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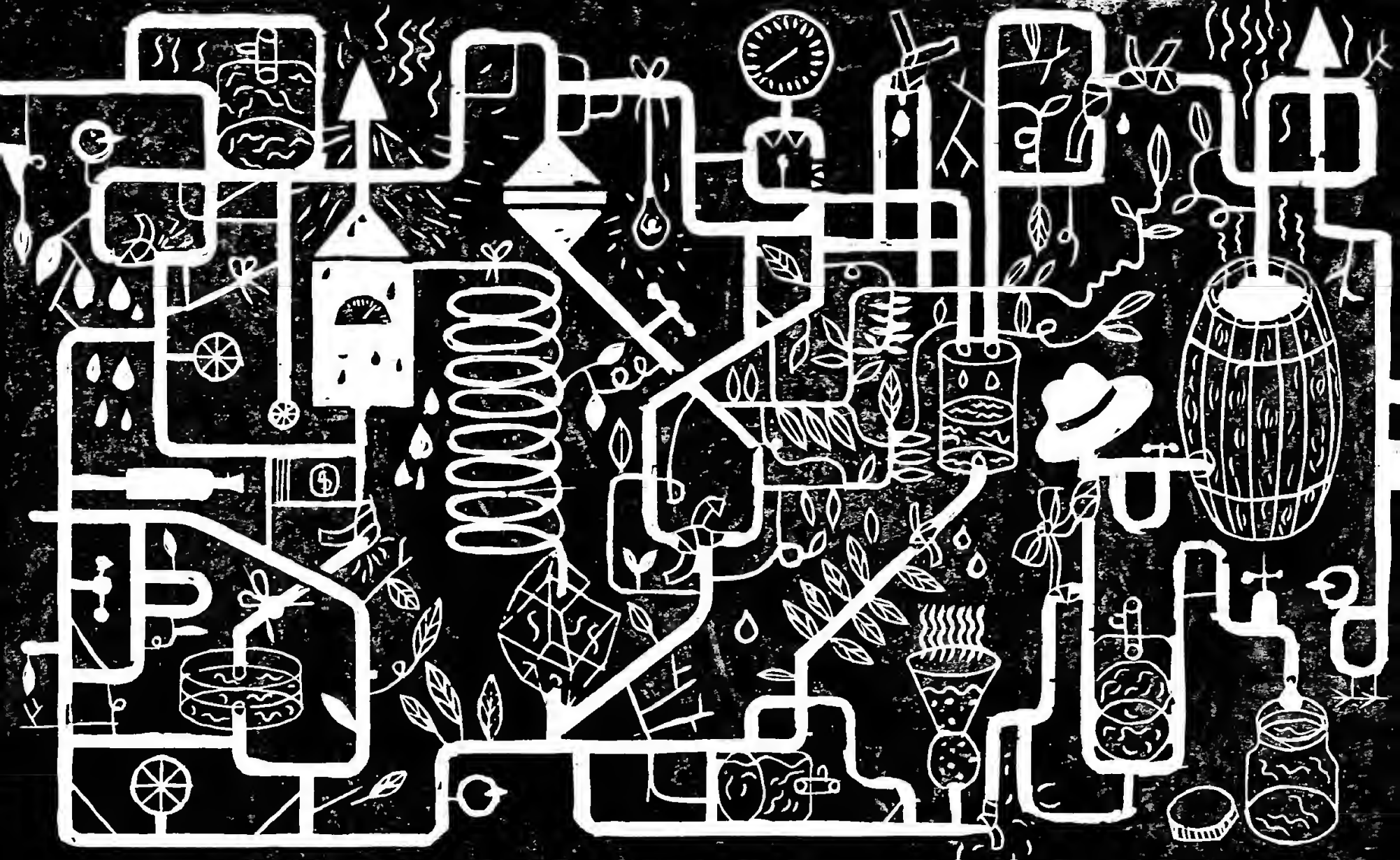
Issue 42 Jul/Aug '12 £4.25

# Little White Lies

Truth & Movies



# ACT 1

"JUST PULL THE
DAMN TRIGGER."

# Lawless

*Directed by* **JOHN HILLCOAT**
*Starring* **TOM HARDY, SHIA LABEOUF, JESSICA CHASTAIN**
*Released* **SEPTEMBER 7**

## JOHN HILLCOAT'S BOOTLEGGING CAPER HAS PLENTY OF SPIRIT, BUT LACKS A TRULY REFINED FINISH.

You don't say 'no' to Cannes. Which is how John Hillcoat's moonshine drama found itself in the wrong place at the wrong time, earning an undeserved reputation as one of the festival's disappointments. Because *Lawless* is singularly unsuited to the jaundiced expectations of the Croisette: too pulpy, too poppy, too violently unrestrained. It's an impulsive, imperfect depiction of family, masculinity and authority - freewheeling but episodic, punchy but never quite persuasive.

Based on Matt Bondurant's compulsively readable bio-saga, *The Wettest County in the World*, *Lawless* pitches us into the creek-streaked woodlands of Prohibition-era Franklin County, Virginia. It's here that the Bondurant brothers Forrest (Tom Hardy), Jack (Shia LaBeouf) and Howard (Jason Clarke), are making a name for themselves as roughhouse royalty in this moonshine kingdom, where every out-house and hollow hides a copper-bottomed whisky still. Liquor flows out of these mountains like rainwater, like the run-off from a storm of corruption, money and blood.

The Bondurants are as deep-rooted in this county as the pines that lichen the landscape. Howard, the eldest, is a Great War veteran and ragged, raging drunk; Jack is the young runt desperate to make something of himself, but it's Forrest who watches over them, mute and massive and redolent of violence. Tom Hardy is cast close to perfection but almost to a fault.





LEAD REVIEW

His Forrest is a creation of implacable will and simple truths. "I'm a Bondurant," he intones, "and we don't lay down for nobody." He appears cut from the earth itself, like some backwoods elemental, a character more imagined than performed.

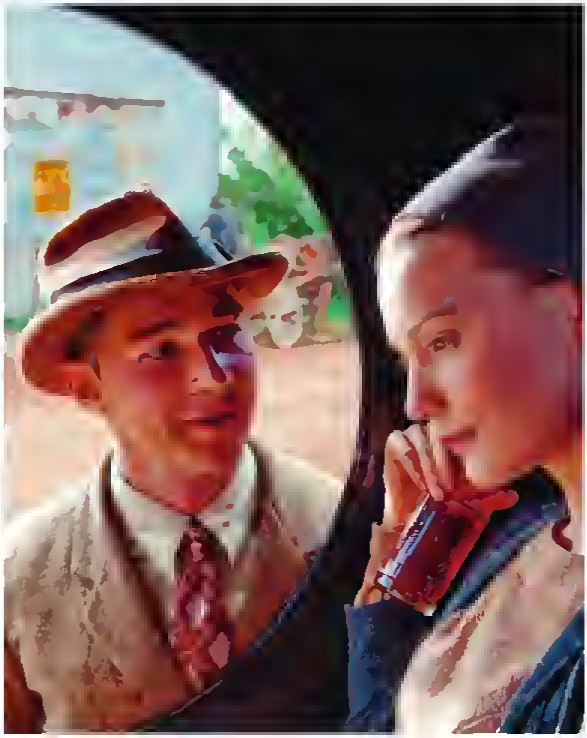
Still carrying his *Warrior* tonnage, Hardy imbues Forrest with brute animal presence. But he's too brooding, too off limits – to himself, to his family, to the audience – to invest him with real vitality. As *Lawless* unfolds, the guttural grunts that make up the bulk of Forrest's dialogue become less taciturn, more unintentionally comic.

So it's left to others to take centre stage, and it's here that *Lawless* comes into its own as an ensemble drama. There's Gary Oldman who deserves more screen time than he gets as Floyd Banner, the flamboyant gangster who gives Jack a break in the bootlegging business. There's Jessica Chastain as Maggie, the Windy City stripper searching for something in Franklin County that she finds in Forrest. There's *Chronicle*'s Dane DeHaan, whose studied naivety as damaged still hand Cricket Pate recalls Leonardo DiCaprio's breakthrough role in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*

And then there's Special Agent Charlie Rakes, brought menacingly, mincingly to life by Hillcoat regular Guy Pearce. Rakes, gun hand of the state's venal authorities, brings a new vision of progress to the "fucking hicks" in Virginia, a confederation of moonshiners, a grand racket with the politicians at the centre, sucking up the dirty money billowing out of the mountains.

If Rakes introduces a clash of values to the county – a competing vision of America's future, the emergence of a vast corporate appetite

**"Rakes queers the pitch, makes *Lawless* something close to camp but also illicit, and threatening. He galvanises the film when he's on screen."**



to devour Franklin's small fry in a single swallow – he introduces something else entirely to the film. With skin stretched too tight over bone and muscle, pinprick eyes and almost erotic sadism, Rakes queers the pitch, makes *Lawless* something else, something close to camp but also illicit, threatening and odd. Equal parts villainous and vaudevillian, Rakes is a profoundly strange concoction, but he galvanises the film whenever he's on screen.

Nowhere more so than his first encounter with Jack, where the pieces of *Lawless* fall into place and you're reminded that few directors can conduct the casual conversation of violence with the clarity and eloquence of Hillcoat. It may also be the point where Shia LaBeouf graduates into something more than Steven Spielberg's spoon-fed protégé. Jack has all the crackerjack energy of a proto-Clyde Barrow, but LaBeouf plays him, too, as an exercise in humiliation – bloodied, tear-streaked, frightened. It's the performance of an actor, rather than just a star.

And yet for all that, there's something missing in the dynamic between the Bondurants. Only Jack has experienced any sort of arc by the time they reach a chaotic and unheroic showdown with Rakes, so you're left feeling something closer to curiosity than sympathy at their fate, never quite touched by its dramatic impetus.

But the real problem isn't about character at all. This is the first time Hillcoat has shot on digital, and the result is close to disastrous. Despite being filmed on location in the forests of Georgia, *Lawless* lacks any kind of visual texture. The image is flat and over-lit, and though at first that offers a notable contrast to the events on screen – normalising and even domesticating these extremes of action and temperament – the lack of depth in the frame ultimately becomes overwhelming. *Lawless* isn't ugly, but it doesn't have the visual identity of, say, *The Road*, in which Javier Aguirresarobe painted in shades of light and dark. Here, DP Benoît Delhomme appears powerless to conjure with the elements in front of him, and the film is consequently leached of life.

And so for all the grit and sweat and gun smoke up there on screen, it remains intangible – at arm's length. You can see it, but you can't touch or taste it. You can't lose yourself in it as you could disappear into the shimmering haze of *The Proposition*. *Lawless* is a film of abundant potentiality, then – strange and edgy and flawed. It was never going to work in Cannes. But it doesn't quite work here, either. **MATT BOCHENSKI**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANTICIPATION.** *A stunning cast, a compelling story and an uncompromising director. Set hopes to 'high'.* | **4** |
| **ENJOYMENT.** *Some classic Hillcoat touches are offset by the film's lack of visual punch.* | **3** |
| **IN RETROSPECT.** *Too much of the energy dissipates on screen, but this is striking and purposeful filmmaking.* | **3** |

# DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY


## JOHN HILLCOAT EXPLAINS HOW ON-SET TENSION PROVIDED THE SPARK FOR HIS BOOTLEGGING DRAMA.

There's a saying 'Films are made in the editing room'. Well, maybe, but it's a fool who overlooks the magic that occurs on set. Out of the pressure – budget concerns, unpredictable weather, the tick-tick-tick of time running out – comes a creative frisson that director John Hillcoat knows all too well. "Most filmmakers don't talk about it," he says, "but it's huge. It's like being on a rollercoaster that you can't get off."

But it's a rollercoaster that Hillcoat has boarded time and again. Over the last seven years, he has directed two brutal dramas that draw raw emotion out of their chosen environments. *The Proposition*, a grimy pseudo-western set in the oppressive climes of the Australian Outback, was Hillcoat's third feature, made in 2005 after a near-10-year hiatus from filmmaking. His 2009 adaptation of *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy's austere post-apocalyptic novel, saw a man and his son traipsing through the embers of civilisation.

Both productions came with a flurry of near-mythic anecdotes, describing the lengths to which Hillcoat and cast would go to capture the perfect performance. Whether shooting *The Proposition*'s grizzled ensemble – including Guy Pearce, John Hurt and Ray Winstone – in baking 57-degree heat, or encouraging Viggo Mortensen to plumb the depths of *The Road*'s decrepitude by losing weight, rarely washing and sleeping in his costume, Hillcoat became known for eliciting extreme emotions in extreme contexts.

For his latest film, such extremity came from elsewhere. "*Lawless* was the tightest schedule I've ever been involved with," the director explains, referring to the Spring 2011 shoot across the state of Georgia, which wrapped in less than two months. "That was a different kind of pressure. We all had this huge challenge of trying to get the scenes done in a very short time, so there was a sense of urgency and focus while on set."

Unsurprisingly, the intense shoot and demanding script saw the film's simmering tension spill off-camera, and the tight-knit troupe, featuring high-profile stars such as Tom Hardy, Mia Wasikowska and Shia LaBeouf, experienced their fair share of friction. "Actors tend to echo some dramas off-screen," Hillcoat says, "including Shia trying to court Mia, and that not working out. And a very intense and close relationship developed between Tom and Shia." The research process, during which the cast became perhaps a little too familiar with their characters' main occupation, moonshine, was also volatile. But Hillcoat found an ally in Jessica Chastain. "I've learned that when you have alpha males, you need a really strong woman there, too, and Jessica was enormously helpful."

**"I've learned that when you have alpha males, you need a really strong woman there, too."**

However, Hillcoat is quick to dispel assumptions that A-list egos can derail a production such as *Lawless*. An atmosphere of collaboration and camaraderie was fostered early on in rehearsals. At that stage, screenwriter Nick Cave would guide the cast through the script so the actors could air any issues without the time pressure of a shoot. "I learned very quickly through that process how each actor works and what their needs are," Hillcoat explains. "Sometimes those things would bubble up in the shoot, but as soon as you get the mutual respect, then you're all in it together. We all got to know each other in that rehearsal room."

Such a patient approach has served Hillcoat well. "Every actor is different as we all have personalities," he says. "Certainly some approaches are easier for some people to work with than others, but I've developed a huge respect for what an actor has to do, which is be truthful in that moment under all this pressure. To really drag up the emotions in that way, in front of everyone, I think it is amazing, so I try to run with whatever it is."

Despite all the tales of past ordeals, Hillcoat challenges the stereotype of the dictatorial director, instead choosing to sit alongside his cast throughout the tumultuous journey. In his films, he doesn't so much manipulate his actors as facilitate their craft, which brings us back to the topic of location shooting. While the remote Georgia backwoods of *Lawless* may not have the overwhelming climate of *The Proposition*'s Outback, Hillcoat stresses the importance of embracing the great outdoors. In comparison to the sterile interiors of green screen studios, he says, the location "becomes like a character that the actors react to". The environment is integral because "they feel it".

And because the cast and crew are all out there together, all pushing forward to a shared goal, there's the potential that something special can be achieved. "It keeps you on your toes, that's for sure," Hillcoat concludes, with just a hint of understatement. "But if there's this kind of common effort, then they want to raise each other's game. That's when it gets really magical. That's what we're all in it for, the reason we go through all this hell."

***Five questions; nowhere to hide.* LWLies *turn the screws on* Lawless *director John Hillcoat as he responds to our hardball survey.***

**Which film in the last five years do you wish you'd made and why?**

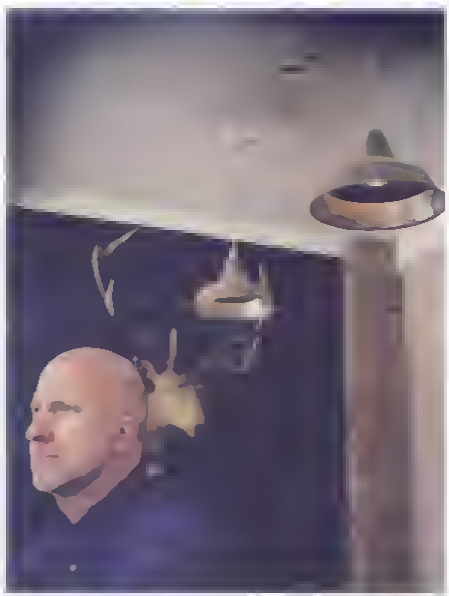
*Let the Right One In* I thought it was a perfect film I like to be transported to another world where everything – the look, the feel, the acting, the sound – is working on multiple layers It's just incredibly detailed and convincing in a great way

**What is your greatest professional regret?**

Having too long between films and being bogged down by one single project. And taking seven years to finally break through that wall. When I started out, I'd be very fixated on one thing, and I lost a lot of momentum and time I've finally twigged that, actually, directors really need several things, because you never know which one will break through Even *Lawless*, I didn't think it was going to be my next film, I thought it was going to be *Triple Nine*

**What is your most memorable moment on set?**

One of the most amazing moments was with Robert Duvall on *The Road* We only had him for two days It was the nighttime scene, it was freezing cold and we were running out of time. I have enormous respect for McCarthy's writing, and I wanted to be faithful to the book, and the dialogue of that scene was taken from the book But it wasn't working. I couldn't put my finger on it It was just one of those moments where we only had one or two more takes left For the last take, I asked him to play around with it, not stick to the script, make it very personal What was weird was it had seemed too cerebral, so just by asking him to personalise it in some way that whole scene all came from him and that one take The whole crew, the cast, all of us started clapping We got it



**Who is your idol?**

Robert Bresson and Yasujiro Ozu I'm most in awe of them because they show so much restraint. People have tried to imitate them. They're so specific, yet they're so simple. And that, to me, is just mind-blowing. I can never get there.

**What will you be remembered for?**

Unfortunately, for unflinching violence. I take violence very seriously. I am anti-violence I've seen it, unfortunately, I've experienced it, and it's really horrible and really ugly and it's part of all of us. I'm interested in analysing that in the characters – what makes it come out, and how it affects us But, when it comes to my work, it's just that little fast outburst that people seem to fixate on

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# Act 2

## CONTENTS

# NO MORE DRAMA

*LWLIES* GOES NOSE-TO-NOSE WITH TOM HARDY AND LIVES TO TELL THE TALE.

WORDS BY ADAM WOODWARD

Ask Tom Hardy about his tattoos and he'll lift up his shirt to reveal them. Our impromptu show and tell session has barely begun before *LWLies* is staring at Hardy's naked torso and the tapestry of motifs that cover his chest, shoulders and upper arms. "Every one reminds me of something in my life, an event, a person, a place" he explains.

Almost the entirety of Hardy's top half is adorned with a constellation of keepsakes and memories he's been steadily accumulating since he was 15. There's a Union Jack emblazoned above his heart ("To remind me where I come from"), and across his collarbone the words '*padre fiero*' ('proud father'). Elsewhere Hardy's fiance, ex-wife and the mother of his son each have their own special tribute. But it's the inflamed pink flesh surrounding his freshest ink that catches the eye. "I got this a couple of days ago" he reveals, framing a pinch of skin above his right bicep between thumb and forefinger. 'II O&R'. "To observe and reflect," translates Hardy. "My acting creed."

It's not uncommon to be greeted in a personable manner by a high-profile star, but Hardy's readiness to expose himself so early in our meeting comes as a surprise. This cordial, unguarded disposition is entirely at odds with the tough guy persona he exudes to such formidable effect on screen. No sooner has the ice broken, however, than the mood turns sour. Hardy picks up a copy of *LWLies* #41 positioned on the footstool in front of him, leafing through before pausing on a spread. It's the 'Time to Die' visual feature comprising photographer David Hountcheringer's darkly compelling 'Do You Want to Die Today?' collection.

He scans each image with furrowed intent, tucking the unruly russet beard he's been growing for the past three months into his chest while keeping his eyes locked on the page. In a bid to snap Hardy out of his trance, *LWLies* offers some context, explaining that the photographs represent each subject's chosen fantasy death scenario – that it's just art. Silence. Then the seemingly innocuous but near fatal question slips out: what would your scene be?

In one swift motion Hardy drops the mag and spins a full 90 degrees. We're now inches apart. Nose-to-nose. As if the elongated S-shaped sofa we're sharing has coiled violently, forcing us to invade each other's personal space. "I really don't appreciate you asking me a question like that" Hardy growls. His fierce, penetrating eyes are fixed in an unblinking stare. "Have you ever had a near-death experience?" he asks.

"I'm speaking from experiential hindsight and I can tell you it's not something to be taken lightly. If you want to talk to me about death you've got to come from that place. It's like asking someone 'How many people have you killed?' You understand what I'm saying?"

Sensing Hardy is on the verge of cutting the interview short (or something worse), *LWLies* extends an olive branch, making it absolutely clear we're not here to unsettle or antagonise him. He sits back, takes a moment to collect himself and gestures for a change of subject. But almost immediately Hardy jolts forward again. "I'm sorry, man. You've just touched on a spot that's very sensitive. You have no idea how close to something I am right now in my personal life. No fucking idea. It's not your fault, I understand that, but you've really struck a nerve.

"I don't want you to get the wrong impression of me," he continues, "I don't want you thinking I'm a dick. Genuinely, that question, what it evokes, is very close to home right now. Those photos just really freaked the shit out of me. At the moment I'm very close to some shit that you're touching on that's very, very serious. You've pushed a massive button in me and I'm just not really in a place to talk about what's going on right now. I wish I could get into it with you, but this ain't the time or the place. Death is a very serious reality to me."

Irrespective of whatever recent personal trauma has made mortality such a sensitive issue, his heated reaction reveals something of the non-defeatist attitude that has come to define Hardy's turbulent 12-year pursuit of stardom. Today, he's one of British cinema's most in-demand exports, having established himself as a brazen scene-stealer in *Inception* and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, and more recently landing meaty roles in *Lawless*, *The Dark Knight Rises* and next year's *Mad Max* reboot.

Ten years ago the picture looked a lot different. "I had a first shot at Hollywood and it went to my head," recalls Hardy. "I started doing things I shouldn't have been doing, mixing with people I shouldn't have been mixing with. I was a fucking mess. The fame got to me, I guess."

Hardy's battle with the demons of his early celebrity came to a head in 2003, when he voluntarily entered a rehab clinic for alcoholism and crack addiction. After getting clean he found work with a small theatre company, took up writing and slowly made his way back onto the screen through a string of TV dramas. As far as the film industry was concerned, however, Hardy was tainted. No studio was willing to touch him. The scripts dried up.

Then Hardy's friend, Kelly Marcel, approached him with a rough draft of a screenplay written with him in mind for the lead role. They took it to a UK distributor who re-wrote it, fired Hardy and brought in Jason Statham. The Stath had it re-written again then walked away, before it eventually fell into the lap of Nicolas Winding Refn. Suddenly, Hardy was back in contention, but he still had to convince Refn he was the right man – the *only* man – for the job. "Nic didn't take much of a shine to me at first," Hardy admits. "I fought damn hard to make *Bronson* happen. I think the thing that swung it for me in the end was the fact I was doing it for me. It got to the point where I just thought, 'If I never get another shot at Hollywood, fine.' I wasn't doing it for the fame anymore; I was doing it for the love of acting."

The sweet irony is that *Bronson* became Hardy's calling card after it went down a storm Stateside. From looking destined to be remembered as just another hot young burn out, suddenly Hollywood was abuzz with talk of a 'British Brando'. "People really took notice. Doors that weren't open before were beginning to pass open," he reflects. "Things totally changed for me after that because I let go of so much, of swimming against the tide, of the fear of facing hurdles and worrying about failure."

Through sheer grit and stubbornness Hardy had risen to his feet and, with nothing to lose, he set his sights on breaking America. The following summer he signed on to *Warrior*, but after months of prep work the studio decided he wasn't going to make the grade. He was deemed uncredible, not bankable enough. Even the MMA experts who trained him said he'd never make the weight to be a convincing fighter. Hardy wouldn't have it. He went away, hit the gym and packed on 13kg of solid muscle (a physique he would regain in order to portray Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises*). Recognising Hardy's mettle, the studio changed its mind. "Doing *Warrior* was the biggest change in terms of my career because it was my first American movie," he explains. "It was a huge transformation, not just a physical one but a cultural one."

The huge emotional and physical strain Hardy has endured over the course of his career, coupled with the slim margin of actors that make it to the top of the pile, makes his current ascendance all the more improbable. In truth, his entire journey has been against the odds. Hardy studied at two private schools but struggled academically, a failing he attributes to his short attention span and lack of guidance. He was an overactive child with an addictive personality. By the time he left school he was unemployable, reckless and growing up fast.

Hardy hit 20 before he was finally encouraged to constructively channel his self professed narcissism. But while the pleasure he took from performing in front of an audience validated his move into acting, once more it was the doubters that stoked the fire. "I'm an addict," confesses Hardy, "which means if you tell me I can't do something I'll do it. If I tell myself I want to do something, however hard or gruelling it might be, I'll do it. Even if it terrifies me. You've got to be an absolute fucking nutcase to pursue a career in acting," he continues. "Either that or you need to really believe in what you're doing. Everyone who said I'd never make it gave me that self belief."

Given what it's taken for Hardy to get to this point, it's no wonder he doesn't take matters of an existential nature lightly. The night before our conversation, Hardy joined his fellow *Lawless* cast members alongside director John Hillcoat at the film's world premiere in Cannes. "Surreal and unfamiliar," is how Hardy describes the experience of being escorted by motorcade to the red carpet. On arrival he was greeted by baying crowds of paparazzi and adoring fans. "I felt like a movie star," he beams, "like how I'd always imagined movie stars feel."

You get the impression, though, that none of it – neither the adulation, the fame nor the wealth – would mean a thing to Hardy if he weren't able to share it with the people who have pushed him all the way. "Seeing myself up there on the screen and having my fiancé and parents by my side, I sensed this release in them, like their faith in me had been rewarded. For the first time I felt that release, too. I was able to see where I was and I realised, 'Fuck, it's taken 12 years to get here.' It's taken this long to arrive, I'm not going to let go now. I don't want to die today."

MICHELLE WILLIAMS

SETH ROGEN

LUKE KIRBY

SARAH SILVERMAN

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## OPENS IN CINEMAS AUGUST 17

MATT BONDURANT'S BOOK, *THE WETTEST COUNTY IN THE WORLD*, LIFTS THE LID ON HIS FAMILY'S MYTHIC HISTORY OF MOONSHINING. HE GIVES *LWLIES* AN INSIGHT INTO HOW HE PIECED TOGETHER THE STORY, AND THE ARCHIVE IMAGES THAT INSPIRED HIM.

# THE BONDURANT BOY

WORDS [illegible] IMAGE[illegible] MATT [illegible]ANT
ILL[illegible]ATION [illegible]ABRIZI[illegible]

"It originally began with the discovery of the 1930 shooting at Maggodee Creek. My father, who was an avid genealogical researcher, came across a newspaper article that talked about a shooting in which his father, Jack Bondurant, was shot, along with his uncle Forrest. My grandfather was still alive at the time so my dad went and asked him about it. He said, 'Oh yeah,' and showed him the bullet hole that went through his chest.

"That sparked a bit of research on the part of my father – he started to compile more newspaper articles about the 'Bondurant boys' as they were known. He knew that my grandfather had been involved in illegal activities, but he wasn't really aware that he was *that* involved – that his father was an infamous figure in the county at the time, along with his brothers.

"Then around 10 or 12 years ago, I started looking in old newspapers and collecting all the images I could find, and those really helped me extrapolate some of the key themes of the book. There's also a book of court transcripts from the Great Franklin County Moonshine Conspiracy trial of 1935 written by a guy called T Keister Greer. My grandfather and his brothers were brought in as witnesses and through these transcripts I got to hear their language and a lot of the things they said. There are no audio recordings of them, obviously, there are no letters from any of these brothers, no diaries or memoirs. We have very little to go on so this was all helpful – to read and hear some of the things they said. That was instrumental in piecing things together.

"Other elements of the story – when one of the brothers gets his throat cut, or aspects of Forrest's relationship with Maggie – are family stories that have been known around Franklin County for a long time. They're almost mythological. It was a matter of putting some of those things together along with whatever I could find in the historical record and weaving them together to construct a dramatic narrative."

This is a picture of my grandfather, Jack Bondurant, circa 1935. His coat looks to be camel hair or maybe cashmere, and note the leather driving gloves. The juxtaposition of these rakish details with the mud-spattered car and rural background told me a lot about my grandfather as a young man. There are no journals or letters to consult, and he never talked of that time, not even to his own children.

I love the details in this photo: the muddy, deeply rutted road, the way my grandmother, Bertha Minix, holds the end of a tree limb, her set, serious face. She is trying to impress someone.

A casual photo of a young Bertha on the back of a car. This seemed like the kind of picture young lovers might take, goofing around.

This is the gun that shot Jack and Forrest. After he shot Forrest, Charlie Rakes said to him, "Oh yes, you are that goddamned hard-boiled son of a bitch!" Then he tried to shoot Howard as well, but another deputy knocked his gun hand down. Rakes was determined to kill them all that day. Nobody knows exactly why. He gets some rough treatment in my novel and even worse in the film. But the man shot my grandfather at close range, tried to kill him and his brothers. Fuck him.

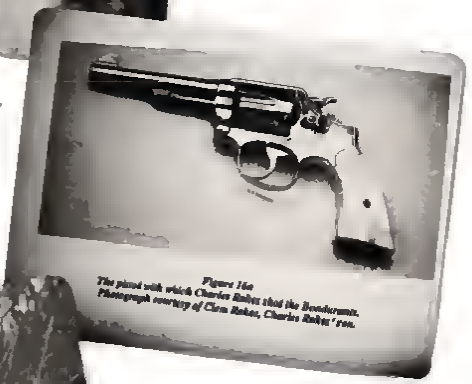
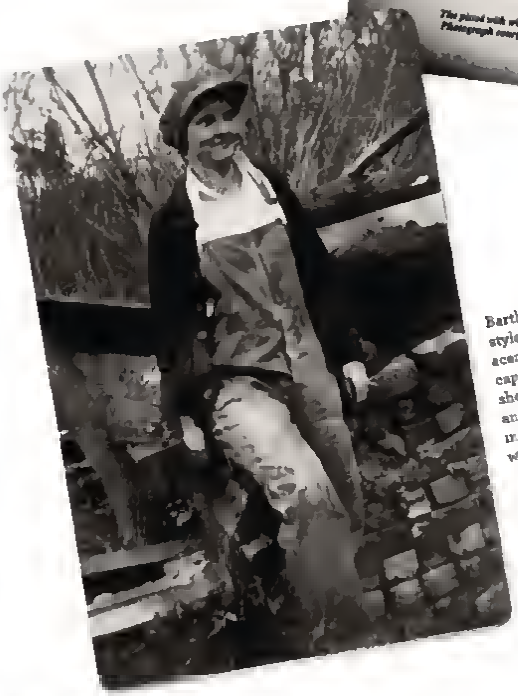


*Figure 16a*
*The pistol with which Charles Rakes shot the Bondurants.*
*Photograph courtesy of Chris Rakes, Charles Rakes' son.*



Bertha Minix, in men's overalls, with a large submarine-style still in the background. This photo gave rise to the scene where Jack takes her to see his still. The man's cap and large sweater she's wearing make it seem like she's disguised for some reason. My grandmother was an especially stoic woman, at least when I knew her in her later years. Here you can see the vibrant young woman she was once. She is clearly having fun.

THE ROANOKE TIMES, ROANOKE, VIRGINIA: TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 11, 1935

# Deputy Abshire Gives Version Of Shooting Of Bondurant Boys

## Says He Never Received a Cent from Brothers or Furnished Them Protection—Flatly Denies Every Charge Brought by Government—States Lee Not On Raids

From the lips of Henry T. Abshire, of Boone Mill Franklin county deputy sheriff the jury in federal district court here yesterday heard the law's side of the controversial shooting of the Bondurant brothers at Maggodee bridge on December 19, 1930.

The jury also heard the 46-year-old officer deny flatly that each every charge that had been brought against him by government witnesses and join his fellow deputies, Howard L. Massey and Will Wray, in a sweeping substitute of the story that they were present when the late Sheriff J. P. Hodges divided the county into districts for the purpose of collecting tribute from moonshine distillers.

### Fourth to Take Stand.

Abshire became the fourth officer to take the stand for the defense following Edgar A. Beckett, former state prohibition inspector and county policeman, who completed testimony begun last Friday afternoon. Several more defendants remain who are expected to testify in their own defense, although probably more than half will not do so.

The defense yesterday indicated its intention to place on the stand John T. Cook, investigator of the Alcohol Tax unit of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and former federal prohibition agent who was unavailable but may be used today. H. U. Dillard, of the defense staff, said he wished to ask Cook about raids made in Franklin county by the federal agents.

Deputy Abshire relating the shooting affair, said that he and the late Deputy Charles L. Rakes and the bridge over Maggodee creek near Burnt Chimney blocked with their car in the afternoon he Forrest and Jack Bondurant drove up in two liquor cars closely followed by a third car the driver of which he did not identify.

Jack stepped his car about three lengths behind Forrest, the deputy claimed, and both brothers jumped the with guns in hand and approached them. While they talked the driver of the rear car jumped the machine between the Bondurant cars, jumped out, backed the second liquor note off, turned around and fled, he added.

### Rakes Drew Gun.

Abshire who asserted he did not have his own gun out of his holster, said he then walked toward the boys as he told Jack that neither he nor Rakes was afraid and that although one car and gotten away the best thing for them to do was to surrender and "take their medicine." Rakes then drew his gun, Abshire continued, and said the boys they were under arrest but then turned slightly to tell the gun and Rakes fired as Abshire failed in his effort to catch Jack's arm.

Forrest fleeing left more run toward them and Rakes shot again dropping him in the snow-covered road. Previously, Abshire declared, Forrest had pulled a roll of bills amounting to about $70 to $75 and attempted to Rakes to let them go but Rakes told him "to no use to offer me that."

A third brother, Howard, and some companions who came up on the shooting occurred, acted as if they had been drinking, said the deputy. Howard gave Jack to a physician's office in an car and Abshire removed Forrest from the scene, he concluded.

It was after the scuffle when the brothers grievously wounded, had recovered that they had charges of bribe taging filed against him and another for wounding taken placed against Rakes held bond thereon by a special grand jury, Abshire concluded. The charges were nolle prossed later and Abshire declared flatly that he never received a cent from either of the Bondurants and never furnished them protection.

Closing moments of the fifth day of the trial were marked by another of numerous exchanges between defense counsel and Judge John Paul, Assistant District Attorney Frank B. Taranner. It had asked Abshire if he did not know that J. O. Helvey, a fellow deputy, was charged in the whisky business in a big way and had been convicted twice in federal court here. Abshire denied that he knew anything about either question.

### Price Takes Issue.

Samuel R. Price then leapt with Taranner on the form of the questions and protested to the court that the government attorney was not only arguing the case but seeking to leave an unfair impression on the jury's minds.

"It is immaterial as affecting the guilt or innocence of J. O. Helvey," ruled the court. "But if is material as to the good faith of this witness who says he is a deputy sheriff that he made every effort to enforce the law." He allowed the question and reply to stand.

Mr. Price took exception to the "court's remarks."

Former Officer Beckett, who on Friday admitted under proof that he made whisky and already gone in his appointment to the prohibition force by Attorney General John R. Saunders, repeated the confession to Sterling Hutcheson special prosecutor, again yesterday and added that he sold the product as well while operating an unlicensed distillery.

A motion by Mr. Hutcheson to have the name his partner in the business was blocked by Judge Paul who told Beckett he need not answer the question. The government attorney asked for an adjournment of chambers but followed consultation with attorneys, the court merely repeated the former advice to Beckett.

The fact that Beckett is a first cousin of former Deputy Sheriff Lewis Bridges, who appeared as a government witness was brought out by Mr. Hutcheson. Beckett also admitted that formerly Mosley was, who is a government witness, is a second cousin.

### Wanted to See Rakes.

The government attorney again brought to the forefront activities of Beckett who Deputy Sheriff T. J. "Jeff" Richards on late October 12 when Richards was given from an [illegible] He drew from Beckett a refusal statement that Richards reported to see Deputy Rakes that day in regard to the investigation of [illegible] property [illegible] "I think you're [illegible] about that," said Beckett when [illegible] asked what they went to see Rakes about. He added that while intending to go he did never did so and he "would rather not see" what the visit was about. It would just scorpen so Judge Paul told him to answer the question and Beckett then said that Rakes was supposed to take the first matchal (albert) R. Winder somewhere and that "Jeff" thought he was fooling Rakes just to get out of it." He interpreted that he did not familiar with the "nature of the case" and could "rather the talk about it" because "it was something I tried to stay out of."

Deputy Abshire, chief of the of Floyd at time trial gave a lift of landmarks to aid his testimony, set forth that he had 10 children, owned three and had 10 children, owned a tract of 30 or 40 acres in Boone Mill which with its buildings on it was worth about $1,000 and a food one worth about $1,000 against the property, over the children of his wife and $1,000 upon he didn't been able to repay and borrowed $2,000 to erect a garage on his property, $3,000 having been repaid in rentals to the tenant of the garage. He said he never received a salary as a deputy and they there are no fees attached of the office at present.

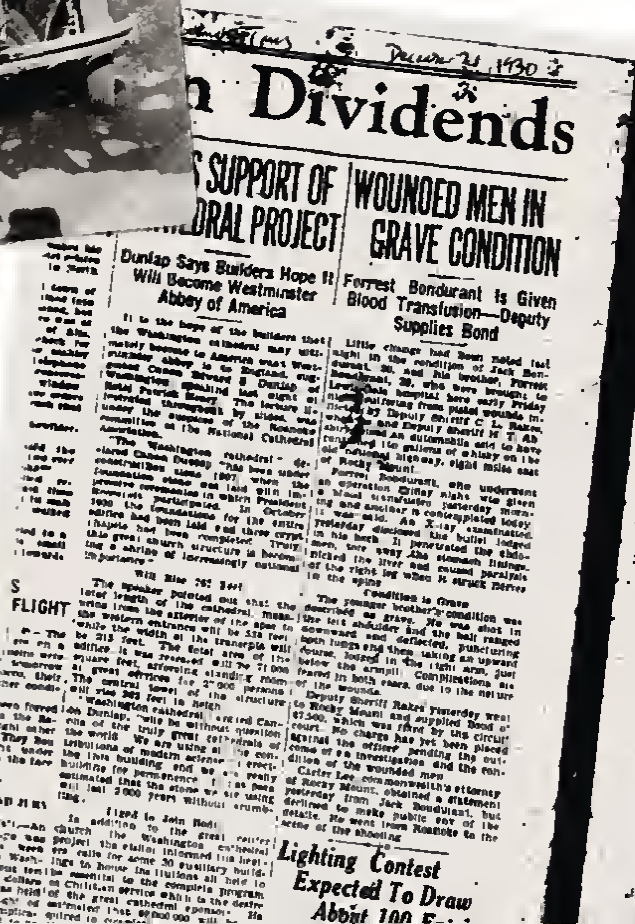
### Went After Brandy.

Abshire admitted that some 12 or 13 years ago he went with a man named Flora to get moon brandy for a lodge celebration. They obtained from "Uncle Lou" F. Webb five gallons of what Webb previously termed the best "doubled and twiced" brandy. Flora had but $30 and Abshire and he assumed responsibility for the balance of of of the $25. Wood asked for the refreshments. He differs with Webb in that he claimed he paid the $5 due while Wood previously said that he sold them 10 gallons and he added hard time getting the balance from the officer.

37

This article from *The Roanoke Times* has the most detailed version of the shootings at Maggodee Creek in December 1930. Some of the details include Deputy Sheriff Abshire telling Jack and Forrest right away he was 'not afraid of them' and how, after shooting Jack, Charlie Rakes turned to Forrest, who was running to his brother, and shot again, 'dropping him in the snow-covered road'. Another interesting detail is that Howard showed up a bit late and apparently drunk, which helped roe form two central aspects of his character

This is Jack sometime in the 1930s. He told my father that when he was a teenager he spent a year saving up for a special pair of boots. I like to think that these high-laced numbers are the very ones.



December 31, 1930

n Dividends

S SUPPORT OF
DRAL PROJECT

Dunlap Says Builders Hope It Will Become Westminster Abbey of America

WOUNDED MEN IN GRAVE CONDITION

Forrest Bondurant Is Given Blood Transfusion—Deputy Supplies Bond

Little change had been noted last night in the condition of Jack Bondurant, 30, and his brother, Forrest Bondurant, 28, who have been brought to the hospital here early Friday morning suffering from pistol wounds inflicted by Deputy Sheriff C. L. Baker, who with Deputy Sheriff H. T. Ab[illegible] had pursued an automobile said to have [illegible] gallons of whisky on the Rocky Mount highway, eight miles east of Rocky Mount.

Forrest Bondurant, who underwent an operation Friday night was given a blood transfusion yesterday morning and another is contemplated today, it was said. An X-ray examination yesterday disclosed the bullet lodged in his back. It penetrated the chest, just missed the liver and stomach linings, pierced the right lung and caused paralysis of the right leg when it struck nerves in the spine.

Condition is Grave

The younger brother's condition was described as grave. He was shot in the left shoulder and the ball ranged downward and deflected, puncturing both lungs and then taking an upward course, lodged in the right arm, just below the armpit. Complications are feared in both cases, due to the nature of the wounds.

Deputy Sheriff Baker yesterday went to Rocky Mount and supplied bond of $7,500, which was fixed by the circuit court. No charge has yet been placed against the officers pending the outcome of an investigation and the condition of the wounded men.

Carter Lee, commonwealth's attorney of Rocky Mount, obtained a statement yesterday from Jack Bondurant, but declined to make public any of the details. He went from Roanoke to the scene of the shooting.

Lighting Contest Expected To Draw About 100 E

S FLIGHT

Will Rise 292 Feet

The speaker pointed out that the total length of the cathedral measuring from the exterior of the apse to the western entrances will be 524 feet while the width at the transepts will be 213 feet. The total area of the edifice is 100,000 square feet, although it will be 71,000 square feet, affording standing room for 2,000 persons. The central tower of the structure will rise 292 feet in height.

Washington cathedral, erected Cathedral of the truly great cathedrals of the world. We are using all the conveniences of modern science in the construction of the building and we are really estimated that the stone we are using will last 2,000 years without crumbling.

Tied to John Rock

In addition to the great center church, the Washington cathedral project the chapel informed the Rockefeller gift to house the illustrious all hole to the complete program of Christian service which is the desire of the great cathedral sponsors. He [illegible] that $2,000,000 will be



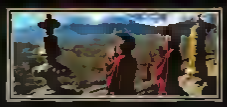
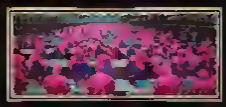
This is a newspaper article from *The Roanoke Times* detailing the injuries of Jack and Forrest after the shooting.

It was one of the first pieces of evidence about the shooting I found, and the gravity of the situation was shocking – they both nearly died.

SHOT ENTIRELY ON 70MM FILM





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# DESIGNING OLD AMERICA

**FOUR LEADING PRODUCTION DESIGNERS REVEAL HOW THEY BROUGHT THEIR VISIONS OF VINTAGE AMERICA TO THE SCREEN.**

WORDS BY DAN STEWART
ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE LI

Whether it's a bootlegging distillery in a ramshackle Georgia farmhouse or a Prohibition speakeasy filled with cigar-chomping wiseguys, images of vintage America have been seared onto our brains by generations of movies. Who is responsible for giving those iconic images currency? Step forward the production designer. Sets, costumes, props, make up – they oversee it all, from the earliest days of production until the last reel is in the can. *LWLies* spoke to four production designers whose work has been steeped in classic Americana to find out how they do it.

## CHRIS KENNEDY
### *LAWLESS*

We started by going to some of the locations in the book, *The Wettest Country in the World*, and meeting some of the families who'd been involved in making moonshine back in the day. They're still doing it. They'd just take you into the back and say, 'You want some?' The history there is still totally alive.

"We went to Georgia and discovered this little valley beside a millpond in Peach Tree City. It was perfect. But we couldn't find the gas station where the Bondurant brothers lived. So I said to the producer 'Let's just build it. Then we can shoot interiors and exteriors at the same time.' He took a bit of convincing but he agreed in the end. I think he might have regretted it later.

"We had about eight weeks of pre-production, which was ridiculous. It was such a tiny amount of time, all the research I could do was go online. I downloaded a few thousand pictures and refined that down to two or three pictures of this one gas station. The idea was to do a faithful recreation of this one specific place. And we thought a bit about how it had become a gas station. This family has been in the Appalachians for generations, what had they done there? So we decided it was a farmhouse with a barn that they'd turned into a coach stop for when the roads were built, then a gas station when automobiles came along. It was important for it to have a life of its own.

"Eight weeks to go before production started, it was just John [Hillcoat], me and a production manager in a hotel room in Peach Tree City. No site office, no nothing. We spent two weeks getting a crew together, another week dealing with some union issues, then an ice storm shut the whole place down for another week. We had four weeks before shooting to have this entire place finished. Four seven-day weeks, working 15 to 18 hours a day, with 30 construction staff from New York. It was a nightmare. We were painting and decorating it while it was still being built. I remember thinking, 'I just want a day when someone doesn't ask me, "What colour is this doorknob? Where do you want this door?"'

"Normally, I do research and I produce a bible of references – photographs, text, film stills – and send them to everyone on the movie. But I didn't have time for that here. In this kind of situation your intuition takes over. Building your own set on location has a fantastic affect on the actors' performances. If actors can actually enter into that world, to the extent that they can open a cupboard and find stuff that's supposed to be in there, then it's much easier for them to get into character and create a performance."

## J MICHAEL RIVA
### *DJANGO UNCHAINED*

"Honestly, period pictures are the easiest to do. The reference beats are set out. If you have a history book, you've more or less got a guidebook in front of you. But Quentin [Tarantino] didn't want to make a 'period' movie. The setting needed to be a little looser than just the 1840s, when the movie is set. We mixed periods a little. We had distinct period references, but also took certain things from spaghetti westerns and more modern movies. We were concerned with verisimilitude, rather than authenticity.

"The important thing was to find things that fitted into the world that Quentin had created in the script. It's a world that doesn't really exist, of course, but it was important that it felt believable. There's a certain gun that they use, for example; it was about 30 or 40 years out of period. But it looked cool, and it sounded great. You've just got to find that sweet spot where everyone on board is like, 'Yeah, that's perfect.'

"Another example is Django's glasses. Jamie Foxx wears these 1960s looking sunglasses. Now they're not from the 1960s, they're actually true to the period. But they look wrong. Other directors might have said, 'No, these look too modern. People won't believe it.' But with Quentin, that's perfect. Not only is it period, but it also looks cool. And with this movie, the soundtrack is full of contemporary songs – there's some Jim Croce on there, some Johnny Cash. So something like that wouldn't stick out as much.

"Of course, I wouldn't put it in if I thought it would distract from the movie. But here, the script and dialogue are so good that you're not worried about taking away from it. And frankly the sunglasses work for Jamie's character. They make an individualist statement about who he is, what he has become. They make him seem more modern, more anti-slavery. They display his confidence. You can't see his eyes, so you can only imagine what's going on behind them."

## JOHN MYHRE
*CHICAGO*

"With *Chicago*, we were tasked with building two separate worlds. One was the real world of Prohibition era Chicago, and the other was a fantasy world of theatre and glamour. That was the fun of the movie. When Roxie (Renée Zellweger) would retreat into her mind, she saw a very theatrical version of the world. That was Rob Marshall's idea from the get go. We used to have 'transition meetings', where we discussed how to segue from the real world to the fantasy world. You know, a lamp in Roxie's apartment would become a lamp in a sleazy nightclub. How does a courtroom become a circus?

"A lot of our inspiration for *Chicago* came from old gangster films from the 1930s. It better suited the storytelling to drew from the glamorous images of that world. It had to be fairly realistic but still fanciful. Some of our key images came from a painter Reginald Marsh, who created these theatrical paintings of dancing girls. It gave us our colour palette and inspired some of the images we used in the movie. We didn't want the movie to look like museum pieces come to life, we wanted it to look seedy, lived-in. The old, faded glory of a crumbling theatre, age and decay.

"I've worked predominantly on period movies. Right now, I'm prepping a remake of *The Thin Man*, again with Rob Marshall. It's set in New York in 1932, which is wildly different from our conception of New York at that time. I was surprised. Did you know that in downtown Manhattan in 1932, people were still driving horse-drawn carriages? In the 1930s, the poor of New York created a tent city called 'Hooverville' right in the middle of Central Park. I have a photo, and you'd think it was a visual effect. We just thought, 'We have to use it. People won't expect it.' It's one of my favourite things: to surprise people, showing them things they'd never expect."

## LAURENCE BENNETT
*THE ARTIST*

"I took a call from my agent asking me if I wanted to do, in his words, a 'crazy little project'. 'It's in black and white,' he said. 'French director, no stars attached.' 'Great,' I said, 'get me the script.' 'Yeah but Laurence,' he said 'it's a silent movie.' 'Get me the fucking script,' I said. I was intrigued. As soon as I read it, I knew it was something very special.

Big? No. No one could possibly have foreseen what would happen to it.

"It was a real pleasure to design a silent movie. It's a purely visual form of communication, which makes your job all the more important. But at the same time, it was like any other movie in that the design begins and ends with the story. You must never upstage the actors. So it was a delicate balancing act. As far as period went, the trick was to be as authentic as possible without taking the audience out of the movie, to be true to the spirit of the period, rather than the letter.

"Working in black and white was hard. We had endless film tests for sets, costumes and material to make sure they looked right in black and white. I have never worked as closely with a director of photography as I did on this movie. When you lack colour and hue, you have to rely on light, texture and patterns. And we were still testing materials as the movie was shooting.

"But we actually created many of the sets in black and white. I couldn't resist it. Everything that was the real world was coloured as it would be in the real world. George's apartment was designed naturalistically, as real as it could be. But all the film sets were decorated in a palette of greys, blacks and whites as much as possible.

"Period stuff on no money is hard. On this movie, I think we had a budget of around $11 million. It's not much in Hollywood terms. It limits your options, you have to make smart choices. And on this, it wasn't just money, it was time. It was a 35-day shoot with only eight weeks of prep – not nearly as much as I would have liked. But it proved to me that good, solid movies will overcome their constraints. This was really a labour of love. And faith."

# THIS IS HISTORY

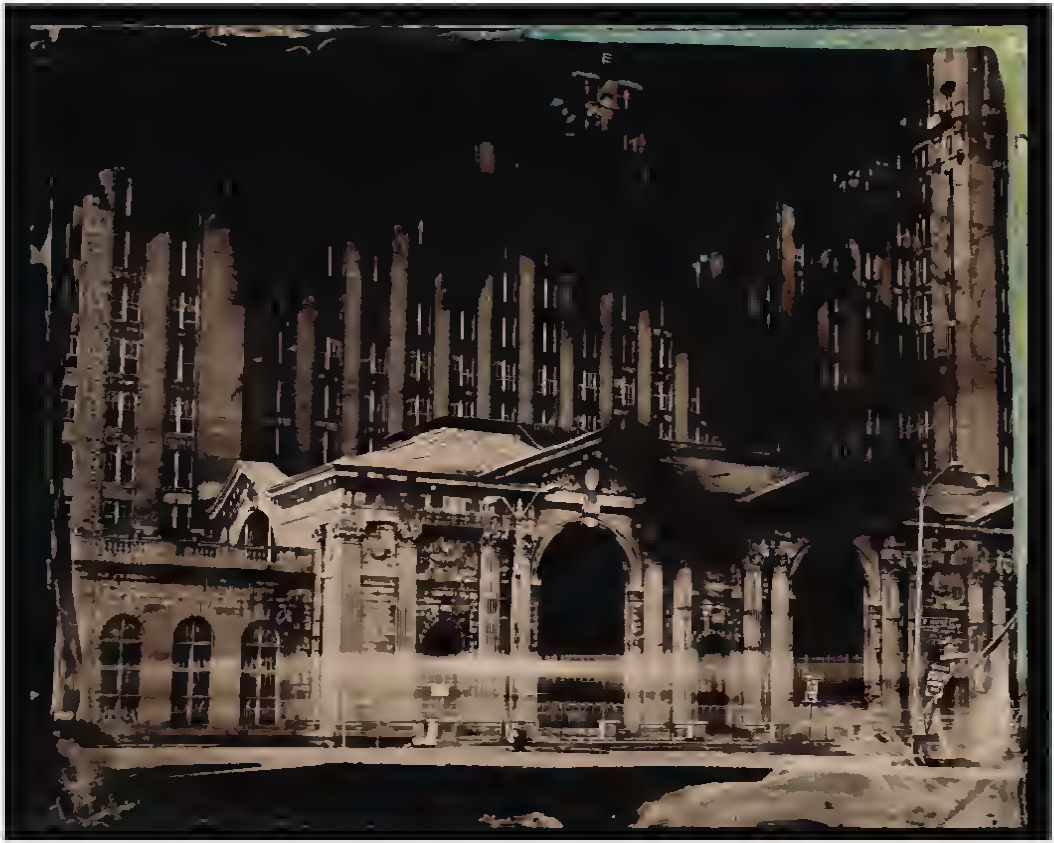
## STATEMENT BY THE ARTIST

Homeland' is a Wet Plate Collodion photo essay documenting the collapse of the American economy by focusing on the people who are re-envisioning and rebuilding life within it. By documenting grassroots efforts across the country, this project aims to connect disparate communities and individuals into a national movement with common ideological threads.

Cities such as New Odeans, Detroit, Pittsburgh and New York will be documented, as well as many smaller towns and rural areas in between. The range of projects documented will include urban farms, bicycle collectives, off the grid homes, alternative fuel producers, art' and theatre collectives, community dinners, free schools and after-school programmes, squats, itinerants, tent cities and many other grassroots social practices.

These grassroots practices are being sought out because of my belief that they constitute a cohesive counter-movement to major social and economic failures of globalised American capitalism. I also believe that the individuals who live in the areas of this country that have been most neglected by industry and investment have been more able to adapt to decaying infrastructure with visionary spirit. It is within this context of renewal within collapse that I situate Homeland'.

ROBIN HASTY USES VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY TO CAST A FRESH LIGHT ON MODERN AMERICA.



ABANDONED TRAIN STATION, DETROIT, MI

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WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5"
2011

BICYCLE MECHANIC AT LA
ECO-VILLAGE, LOS ANGLES, CA

*

WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5"
2011

BEN WOLF, NEIGHBOURHOOD
SCULPTOR, DETROIT, MI

*

WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5'
2011

NEIGHBOURHOOD KIDS, DETROIT, MI

*

WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5"
2011

ABANDONED SIX FLAGS, NEW ORLEANS, LA

*

WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5"
2011

LEONARD, MAKER OF SALVATION MOUNTAIN, SLAB CITY, CA

*

WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5"
2011

ABANDONED PROJECTS, DETROIT, MI

*

WET PLATE COLLODION TINTYPE
4" X 5"
2011

## COMPOSER NICK CAVE TAKES US INTO THE PROCESS OF CREATING THE *LAWLESS* SOUNDTRACK – A CONTEMPORARY BLUEGRASS CLASSIC.

**INTERVIEW BY ADAM WOODWARD**

Obscenely talented Brighton-based frontman, songwriter, author, screenwriter, composer, occasional film actor and all-round dude Nick Cave has been collaborating with fellow Aussie John Hillcoat since 1988, when he starred in and scored Hillcoat's directorial debut *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead*. Since then he's written music for each of Hillcoat's four subsequent features with regular partner Warren Ellis, plus screenplays for 2005's *The Proposition* and now *Lawless*.

Away from film, he's released 14 studio albums with the Bad Seeds, two eponymous LPs with alt-rock group Grinderman, and penned a couple of novels for good measure – the most recent of which, *The Death of Bunny Munro*, began life as a screenplay for Hillcoat. Here, Cave describes the processes and partnerships that informed the making of the bluegrass-infused *Lawless* soundtrack.

**LWLies: What was the initial concept for the *Lawless* soundtrack?**

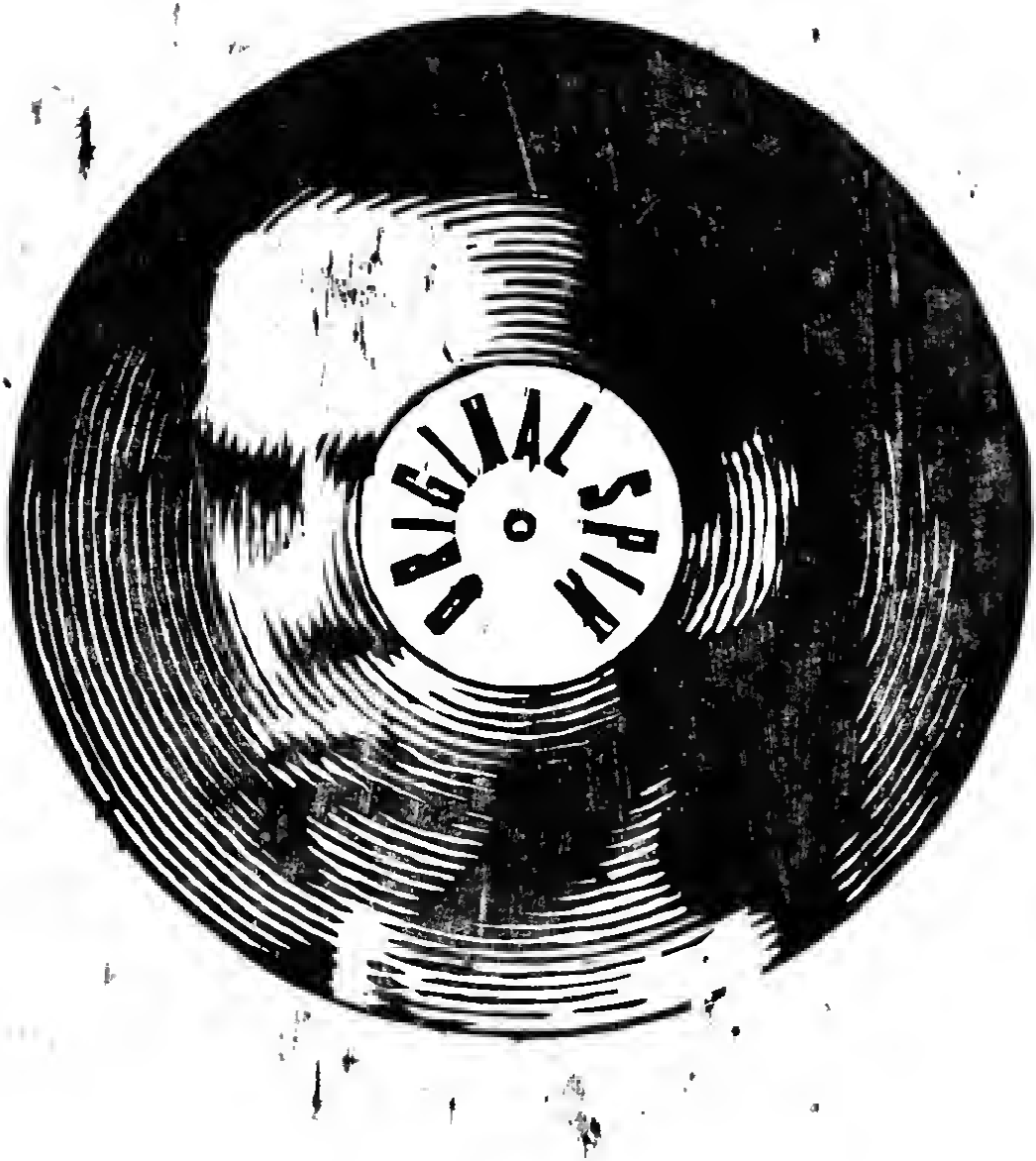
Nick Cave: Very early on, John [Hillcoat] and I decided that we wanted to do a soundtrack that was based on songs. But we also felt that the very top range Americana style soundtrack had already been done by the Coen brothers in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Because of the nature of the story we thought we would do something that was much more rough, with more gutbucket performances. And the way we went about doing that was to do the music ourselves, we did our own versions of bluegrass music using a bunch of people that actually had no idea how to play that kind of stuff. We felt that would give it a rawer feel.

**Why did you decide to use mostly contemporary songs?**

We tried to make a point about that fact that a lot of what's going on in the story still goes on to this day. We also did versions of existing songs. For example, we had the Velvet Underground song 'White Light/White Heat' sung by Ralph Stanley, who's a kind of jewel in the crown of bluegrass music. And we did stuff with Emmylou Harris in much the same way.

**'White Light/White Heat' is famously about heroin and amphetamine abuse. Was Ralph aware of that?**

He wasn't familiar with the song and I think he had one eyebrow raised throughout the recording. It was very amusing, there were definitely a few times where you could see him questioning his own wisdom in allowing himself to be involved with this. But it turned out beautifully, and Lou Reed actually dropped by for a few days to record some stuff, so that really added to it.


ORIGINAL SPIN

**You formed a band for the soundtrack, The Bootleggers. How did that come about?**

It's basically me and Warren [Ellis]. We brought in George Vjestica, who's a wonderful guitarist we've worked with before, and a girl called Leila Moss. Leila came in to demo the stuff for Emmylou, but she blew us away so we ended up using her. It was just a ramshackle band but we were offered all kinds of access to the great session musicians working in LA. But whenever me and Warren work on any soundtrack there needs to be a personal connection to the music, so we often end up playing everything ourselves. Obviously, when we need to get strings and such in we do, but basically it's just us. I think that gives a kind of intimacy to what we do that you sometimes lose with session musicians.

**Did you keep the screenplay and the music separate during the writing process?**

Very much together actually. When I'm writing a screenplay I always like to have the music in my head. It depends on the screenplay, though. *The Proposition* had musical cues in the script, much to everyone's horror, because at that stage I really didn't know how to write a screenplay and so I probably broke a bunch of rules. But for sure we talked a lot about the music while I was writing the script. In fact, there were certain scenes left open because we wanted the music to inform the mood.

**Can you give us an example?**

When Tom Hardy has his run-in with the thugs outside the bar, the description of how he falls and the way the snow falls around him is quite long and detailed in the script. It's deliberately lengthy because it gives enough room for a whole verse of that song to play out.

**What was the main thematic thrust for the soundtrack?**

The main thing was prohibition. Not prohibition as it's most commonly known today but modern day prohibition, which we see as the current policy on drugs. It's widely acknowledged that prohibition of alcohol didn't work, and we feel the same way about the current drug laws that cause a lot of grief and harm. Initially we were going to open the film with an incredible rapid-fire montage showing prohibition through the ages, starting with Mexican cartels and going back through heroin dealing in New York right back to John Hancock. We wanted to make a point about the fact prohibition has always existed in some form or another. That's why we have someone like Ralph Stanley singing a contemporary song about drug taking.

**Tell us about the actual recording process.**

We bashed most of the tracks out in a studio in Brighton owned by Unkle. We did it in a very rough way. There were all sorts of spill problems because we didn't separate anything, we were just banging away on different instruments in the same room. Some people considered it unworkable, there was a lot of pressure for us to do it again. But we won out in the end. It was just a matter of taste, I think. The way people work on soundtracks is very different to the way Warren and I go about things. We're always faced with problems because of how we choose to record things. We record quickly and unconventionally. We approach things in a very rock'n'roll way because that's where we come from. We know what we're doing but a lot of the time other people don't know we know what we're doing. It's a constant battle, but I think we're winning so far.

*Head to the littlewhitelies.co.uk in the week of the film's release to see Nick Cave's track-by track breakdown of the* Lawless *OST with accompanying audio clips*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WORDS BY BETHANY RUTTER
ILLUSTRATION BY EVE LLOYD KNIGHT

# SHINE-ON

## GET PISSED OR DIE TRYING WITH A LAWLESS-STYLE MOONSHINE RECIPE.

The modern whiskey brewer might hide his stills away in the roof of a house rather than a mountain hollow, but in Franklin County, the homebrew hooch trade is alive and well. Although today's liquor is mostly exported to low-income areas of big cities, residents of Virginia are still known to bring the occasional jar of mountain dew to a party, and various ailments can supposedly be cured by a mixture of moonshine, tree bark and roots. For a taste of the Blue Ridge Mountains, gather up the following gear and get brewing.

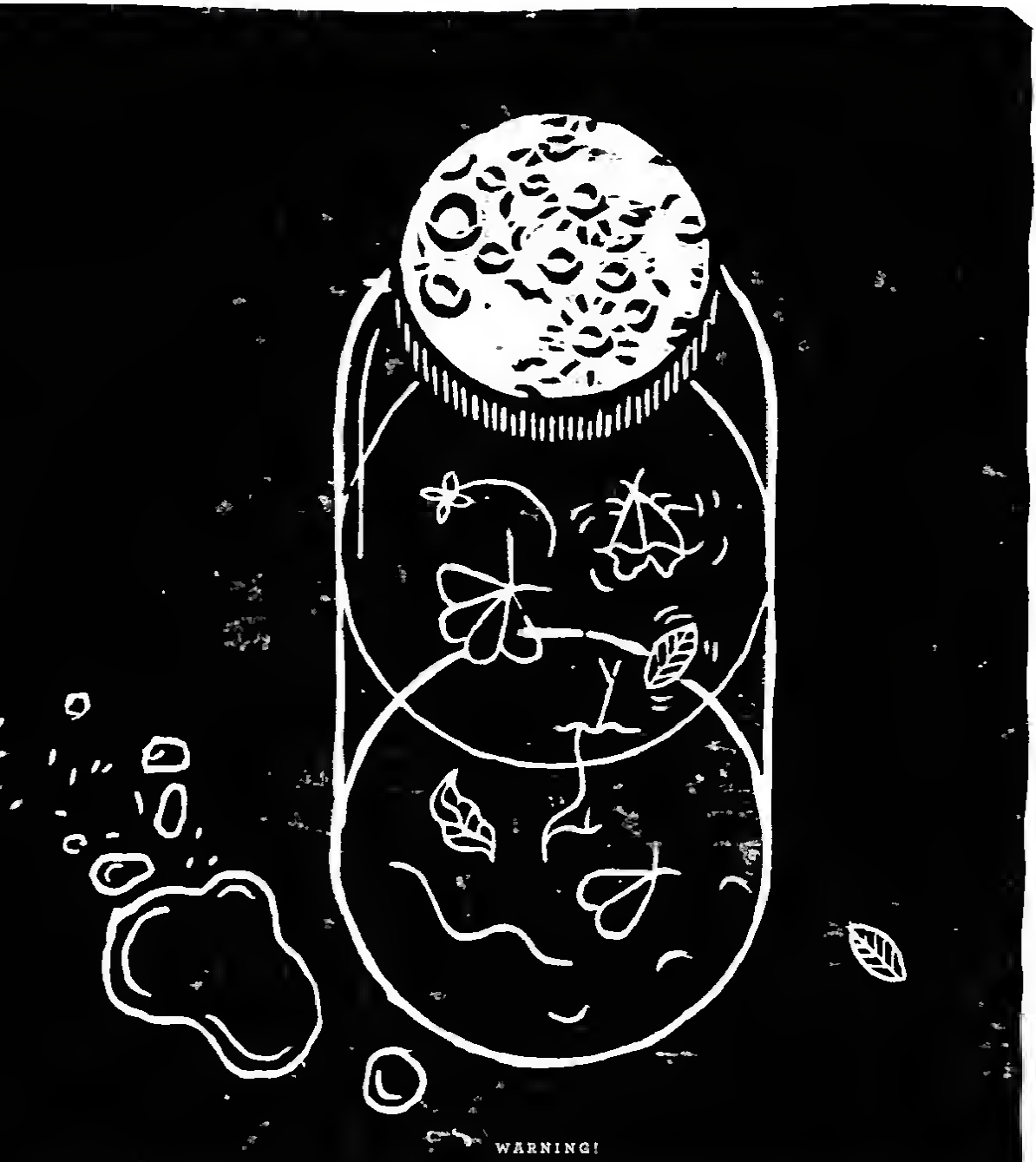
### YOU'LL NEED

A few large ceramic pots
A large pressure cooker
Coiled copper piping
25lbs cornmeal
100lbs sugar
100 gallons of water
8oz yeast
Charcoal

### INSTRUCTIONS

Heat water on the stove until it reaches a steady boil
Add cornmeal to make mash
Set aside the mash and let it cool until it's warm to the touch
Add sugar and yeast
Put the mash to one side and let it ferment for five days

When the mash stops bubbling it is ready: you now have sour mash, or beer
Put the sour mash into the pressure cooker until it reaches 173 degrees Fahrenheit and the alcohol content rises to the top
Using a coiled copper pipe passed through cold water, trap the alcohol vapours in a vessel
As the vapours from the hot pressure cooker pass through the cold copper tubing, they slowly condense to form liquid moonshine
To make the beverage fit for consumption, filter it through charcoal



WARNING!

*LWLies* accepts no responsibility for horrible accidents or horrific fiery deaths sustained during this process.

# HAMMERED & SICKLE

WORDS BY
SORREL NEUSS

ILLUSTRATION BY
ADRIAN JOHNSON

SIX YEARS BEFORE AMERICAN PROHIBITION, TSAR NICOLAS II OUTLAWED THE SALE OF LIQUOR IN RUSSIA. BUT HE COULDN'T SAVE THE EMPIRE FROM DROWNING IN VODKA – AS ONE *LWLIES* CORRESPONDENT DISCOVERED.

*It's 10am and I wake up in my own bed, feeling good. I've just had my first big night out in Kyrgyzstan, a former Soviet republic in Central Asia where I'll be working for the next year. It was a laugh: had a couple of vodka shots chased with nibbles of mini pickled squashes I call 'UFOs', insightful conversations about the country, a quick dance and a cheap taxi home. But rolling over I notice that the mattress is wet, there's an empty bucket on the floor and the curtains are pebble-dashed with carrot chunks.*

*My memory ends where my shame began. Turns out it wasn't a few shots, it was four bottles between five of us, the chats about Kyrgyzstan punctuated a toast every three minutes, and, after kissing a girl I didn't know on the dance floor, I passed out cold in the taxi and had to be dragged up three flights of steps, smashing my head against the concrete walls all the way, puking violently and wailing as if I was being abused. The bruises don't hurt. I'm not hungover. Vodka has 'special' powers. It inexplicably becomes part of my daily life.*

*A Muslim country, Kyrgyzstan has no real history of drinking strong spirits. They learned that from the Russians, who absorbed Central Asia into their vast empire in the nineteenth century. Slamming a glass of neat vodka in a toast to everything from the start of summer to the birth of a new baby to the death of a squished fly, has been part of the Russian soul for centuries.*

*Tsar Nicolas II introduced prohibition to the country in 1914 – six years before America – but the battle against drink has been a long, slow defeat. According to medical journal The Lancet, in 2010 vodka (and its moonshine variants) was to blame for more than half of all deaths of Russian men aged 15-54, and a fair number of women, too. Drunken accidents, brawls, alcohol poisoning and drink-related diseases have dragged the average age of Russians down to just 60. Potent and pervasive, vodka has soaked to the core of Russian society.*

*With an alcohol content of between 40-55 percent and a taste that's hard to swallow, the only reason to drink vodka is to get drunk. The ritual is simple. It's poured in 50ml measures and necked to the toast, 'Na Zdarovia!' ('To health!'), followed by a slurp of fruit juice or a salty snack such as cured fish, smoked cheese, roe or pickled vegetables. In company, a shot is taken at least every half an hour – more often at weddings and birthdays – and the bottle top is often thrown away when the first drinks are poured.*

*The rise of vodka, which gets its name from the cute, diminutive form of water, 'voda', evolved from a pre-existing hard-drinking culture. Medieval Russians ritually supped mead and a low-alcohol rye based beer called 'kvas'. A fixture of both religious and secular ceremonies, drinking was even obligatory on certain occasions. As historian David Christian writes in his book Living Water: Vodka and Russian Society on the Eve of Emancipation, 'alcohol [was] regarded as an item of necessity rather than an indulgence.'*

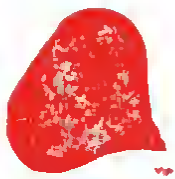
*But indulgent it became. When distilled grape wines arrived from Europe in the late fifteenth century, monks quickly learned how to distil firewater from grain, and vodka was born. Its reputation as a hard man's drink was earned instantly: Ivan the Terrible gave vodka to his oprichnik, the special police force that carried out their orders to loot, rape, burn, kill and torture in his name.*

*To administer 'little water' to his thugs, Ivan opened state-owned 'kabaks', or taverns, which became popular watering holes with peasants, too – so popular that by 1648 a third of the country's men were in debt to them and so switched to making moonshine. In an effort to stamp out home production, Peter the Great (who, it's thought, drank up to two litres of vodka a day and mistrusted all teetotallers, especially Turks) made it obligatory to have a*

licence to sell vodka. Yet most of the spirit available, wheth er official hooch or moonshine, was horror booze filled with impurities that had to be downed in one until Catherine the Great made vodka production a privilege of the upper classes, who introduced charcoal filtration.

Double or triple filtered and consequently much smoother, vodka became easier to drink, so more people did. Aghast at its role in Russian society, a priest from the Yaroslavl region near Moscow described a number of incidents in his village in a letter to the Imperial Geographical Society in the late 1840s. 'Even on days which are not festivals, the [locals] will try not to miss an opportunity of getting drunk,' the priest wrote. 'If he is contracted to build a boat or chop wood, he has to drink a *litoska* [toast], if someone is hired, again a drink; if someone has concluded a contract, a drink; or bought logs to start building, or sold something... Not one drinking session goes without a fight. Sometimes it happens that rivals, after exchanging several full-blooded blows without understanding why, will ask each other "What are you fighting about?" and then they drown their enmity in a half bottle of *polugar* [a 30-40 per cent proof bread wine]. But even the most hardened drinker will return home at midnight, or early in the morning, sleep, sober himself up with *kvas* and work as hard as ever until the next Sunday.'

If that sounds like an average summer bank holiday weekend in Britain, drinking in this nineteenth century Russian village involved minors as well. 'It's one thing for the peasants to drink, but they also teach their children to drink,' the priest explained. 'One can hardly fail to be surprised when a child who cannot yet walk or talk reaches out for vodka, asks for some with gestures, is given some, and then drinks it with pleasure. A four- or five-year-old will drink a full glass.'



By the beginning of the twentieth century there was one bootlegging distillery for every 10 households. Finally, in 1907, anti-drink campaigner Demitrovitch Tchelisheff, a former peasant-turned millionaire, lobbied hard for prohibition. Given that dissent was brewing across the land and Russians were drinking $1bn worth of vodka a year – providing the state with around 40 per cent of its revenue – he had his work cut out. "It dawned upon me that Russian bureaucracy did not want the people to become sober, for the reason that it was easier to rule autocratically a drunken mob than a sober people," Tchelisheff told the *New York Times*.

Tchelisheff eventually got the government on board after convincing the Tsar that the rise in socialist agitation was apparently fuelled by vodka-soaked wasters. But prohibition wasn't sealed until the outbreak of World War I, when the authorities discovered that some soldiers were too drunk to board trains or load equipment bound for the front line. That year the Russian army seized shops' licenses to sell alcohol and confiscated over 530 million litres of vodka. Prohibition remained in effect during the revolution and the civil war that followed, but when the Bolsheviks (who were a relatively sober mob) ran low on funds, they employed the most effective get rich quick scheme known to Russian leaders – vodka was back on the shelves of state-run dispensaries by 1925.

Soldiers in many former Soviet countries today are paid peanuts – in Kyrgyzstan it's around £30 a month – and rations of vodka at the barracks constitutes one of their few perks. The flow of booze to fighters began in World War II when soldiers received a shot of 'little water' a day. The habit was soon taken up outside the armed forces. In 1958 the communist youth organisation

**"Those who couldn't afford to properly distil grains drank aftershave, antifreeze, methanol and the toxic waste from factory production. Many people died."**

*Komsomol Pravda complained that members of its national soccer team were so drunk they couldn't score a goal from five yards away. An anti-alcohol campaign was launched that year and again in 1972. Propaganda stating that Russia's long-standing drinking culture was a slanderous myth invented by the West, posters depicting drunkards with grog blossoms on their noses drowning the country's factories in vodka, or hard working women with their sleeves rolled up saying 'Eradicate this evil' had little effect.*

*According to Soviet national statistics, by 1980 Russian adults were drinking the equivalent of four 25ml shots of vodka every single day – that's a bottle a week. When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 he immediately launched the most aggressive anti-booze movement seen in Russia since prohibition. Revoking licenses, banning vodka drinking at Soviet embassies and destroying vineyards used to make wine, Gorbachev became known as 'Mineralni Sekretar', 'The Mineral Water Secretary'.*

*During the four-year campaign life expectancy rose by 2.6 years to 65.1 and the murder rate dropped by around 30 percent, but the fallout was catastrophic. Illegal production of moonshine, called 'samogon' almost doubled in the '80s. Those who couldn't afford to properly distil grains drank aftershave, antifreeze, methanol and the toxic waste from factory production. Many people died and the continued practice of mixing such poisons with water, which is still sold illegally in kiosks across Russia, brought an end to the campaign in 1988 and is partly responsible for the fact that the country currently doesn't have a large enough population to meet its economic needs.*

*Real booze soon returned. Boris Yeltsin fuelled the stereotype of the inebriated Russian blunderer. In 1994, during a visit to Germany, a band struck up a Russian folk song at a champagne luncheon. The president, in rude health and enjoying the bubbles, jumped onto the stage, snatched the baton and conducted the brass band while singing, dancing and blowing kisses to the audience. A month later, Yeltsin was supposed to meet the Irish prime minister Albert Reynolds in Dublin. His plane flew into Shannon Airport but the Irish leadership were left waiting at the end of the runway red carpet for an embarrassingly long time before the Russian president's advisors told them that Yeltsin was 'unwell' and would not be coming out. On returning to Moscow, Yeltsin reprimanded his advisors for not waking him up, although journalists agree that he was out of it.*

*That same year – evidently an omnus inebrius for Yeltsin – the President got so drunk during a visit to Washington that he was found standing outside the White House in his underpants, trying to hail a taxi so that he could go and buy a pizza. The following night he was mistaken for an intruder when Secret Service agents found him stumbling around the basement of his guest house.*

*For many regular Russian citizens, the antics aren't so glamorous. When my partner and I returned to the UK – our time in Kyrgyzstan over – I looked over at his fingers and saw that they were swollen at the tips. He looked like a tree frog. Medical tests confirmed that he had 'clubbing of the extremities' caused by liver damage. He had pulled back from daily vodka drinking just in time to prevent more serious illness. I have yet to be prodded and poked.*

# ELECTRICK CHILDREN

A FILM BY REBECCA THOMAS

"WITNESS meets ALMOST FAMOUS"

Lee Marshall - Screen Daily

"As irresistibly fizzy as a sachet of Pop Rocks"

Leslie Felperin - Variety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## REVIEWS CONTENTS

# Shadow Dancer

*Directed by* **JAMES MARSH**
*Starring* **CLIVE OWEN, ANDREA RISEBOROUGH, GILLIAN ANDERSON**
*Released* **AUGUST 24**

It's clear that Andrea Riseborough is one of Britain's most remarkable young actors. Though - like Colin Farrell before her - she's been cursed by a throng of horrendously subpar collaborators. As a rule, she delivers very good performances that do much of the heavy lifting in very bad films. *Brighton Rock*? No ta. *Made in Dagenham*? We'll pass, thanks. *Never Let Me Go*? Sigh... *W.E.*? Taxi... to the abattoir!

Thankfully, all trends exist to be bucked, and so it is with *Shadow Dancer*, an ambiguous, multi-layered mélange of deception, bureaucracy, subterfuge and personal one-upmanship set against The Troubles in Ireland during the early '90s. Riseborough stars as Colette McVeigh, our ethically conflicted and pallidly glamorous heroine. She's a terrorist-by-proxy who apprehensively places bombs in various public hotspots at the behest of her firebrand siblings. The flame of political dissent flickers within her, mainly due to the fact that her younger brother was an innocent victim of the street-level conflict. Her constant proximity to extreme violence, however, is far from ideal.

Political journalist and author Tom Bradby has adapted *Shadow Dancer* for the screen from his own 1998 potboiler. Although less narratively complex than Tomas Alfredson's skillfully abridged take on John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, this film is just as proficient at imbuing its characters with fine, secretive shades and presenting the process of life-or-death decision-making as a state of constant, dangerous flux. It's a story in which characters constantly attempt to anticipate the outcome of their actions, without ever daring to think what horrors the eventual end game may bring.

When captured following a bungled mission in London, Colette is given a Sophie's Choice: she can work with Scotland Yard and inform on her family in order to save herself and her young son, or she can string them along and furtively pursue her prolonged anti-English blitzkrieg. Clive Owen's committed detective, Mac, is convinced she'll do the right thing, even while his higher-ups employ more underhand, short-order tactics in their desperate scrabble for results. He knows she's in an extremely dangerous spot, surrounded by goons and enforcers who wouldn't think twice before aerating her brain with a bullet if they harboured even the mildest inkling that she was selling their cause down the river.

Director James Marsh is known primarily for his documentary work (*Wisconsin Death Trip*, *Man on Wire*, *Project Nim*), even if he dabbled in fiction filmmaking with 2005's middling eddball thriller, *The King*. Though his populist and thought-provoking non-fiction work occasionally suffers from didacticism and melodrama, he has a track record as a master storyteller, and with *Shadow Dancer* he appears at last to have struck a satisfying balance between surprising, challenging plot reveals and genuine subtlety of purpose.

By the time all the characters are introduced, every line, every gesture, every power play is loaded with uncertainty. It never quite attains *Miller's Crossing*-level narrative sleight-of-hands, but there are enough moments of moral haziness to keep you hooked. Most impressively, a stolen kiss that occurs between Colette and Mac late in the proceedings becomes the potentially duplicitous emotional affirmation that tilts the entire film on its side. In a very good way.

When Marsh's film screened at the Berlin Film Festival early in 2012, some were quick to dismiss it as middlebrow genre fare. And, frankly, there isn't much in *Shadow Dancer* that doesn't already feel familiar, from the fuggy, grey-brown depiction of the Belfast suburbs as seen in the early segments of Steve McQueen's *Hunger*, to the in-the-moment hand-held camerawork care-of Rob Hardy, who collaborated with Marsh in 2009 on his segment of the *Red Riding* trilogy. And though ataling it has become a cliché, there are even echoes of TV's *The Wire*, in that you're never sure whether you should be rooting for the cops or the crims.

But *Shadow Dancer* does the easy things right, and it makes you appreciate how rare that is in politically-infused genre thrillers. The various action set pieces are immaculate, from the opening long-take of Colette boarding the Tube and psychologically priming herself to do something awful, to the amazing hoax assassination that Colette is roped into at the eleventh hour. Hitchcock appears to be one of Marsh's key influences, with some moments recalling his early chase-action movies like *Saboteur* or *The 39 Steps*, while the central doomed love story is straight out of *Notorious*.

Though it depicts the violent political machinations of a specific time and place, *Shadow Dancer* also speaks to the push and pull between individual and state, family and concerned outsiders, and achieving lasting change through peace and violence. It's Clive Owen's best film in a long, long time, and there are some splendid supporting turns from safe-hands character actors like Aidan Gillen and Gillian Anderson. It is Riseborough, however, who steals the show. Finally she's part of a creative enterprise that's entirely worthy of her immense talents. It's about time. **DAVID JENKINS**

**ANTICIPATION** *James Marsh is fast turning into one of Britain's most interesting and diverse directors* **4**

**ENJOYMENT** *Everyone involved brings their A game, especially Andrea Riseborough* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT** *This is Rolls-Royce genre entertainment. Hard-hitting, thought-provoking, tense, memorable.* **4**

*Interview by* DAVID JENKINS *Illustration by* RUPERT SMISSEN

# James Marsh

We know James Marsh as an exponent of quality documentaries such as *Man on Wire* and *Project Nim*. With his latest work, *Shadow Dancer*, he proves that he's just as adept when it comes to spinning a fictional yarn, albeit one rooted in the realities of Northern Ireland's Troubles. In the film, Andrea Riseborough plays an anti-English terrorist who desperately wants to escape a life of violence, while Clive Owen plays a detective offering her a shot at freedom. Here, Marsh takes us through the rules he played by in making the film.

## 1. Defy the cynics/embrace genre

"*Shadow Dancer* is a genre film. It's a thriller. It plays out in a very realistic environment. It has this serpentine story that you need to follow closely. The audience's understanding is pitched at the same level as Clive Owen's character, more or less. You uncover and discover what's really going on in the story at the same time as the characters do. And they're real-life stories. These kinds of things did happen in Northern Ireland. Genre films by their nature often heighten the mundane reality, and we wanted to get at the real people and the real situations."

## 2. Find the right material

"I first came into contact with Tom Bradby's novel about a year and a half before we shot the film. I didn't know who Tom was at that point as I hadn't lived in the UK for some time. I knew he was an ITN correspondent. My initial response was, 'Do we really need another film about Northern Ireland? Am I the right person to do this?' But I got very, very gripped by this universal idiom in the story which is, what would it be like to betray your own family and everything you stand for, and on a daily basis? It wasn't an ongoing, obsessive interest in the history of Northern Irish politics."

## 3. Reference, don't imitate

"I watched the film *Marnie* by Alfred Hitchcock just by chance before making this film, and it struck me how brilliant the costumes were. The look of *Shadow Dancer* was very important to me, so I asked my costume designer [Lorna Marie Mugan] to watch *Marnie* to get some ideas, not so much to copy it as to attempt to capture the boldness of that film. That's the reason why Colette [Andrea Riseborough] wears a little red raincoat.

"One of the other things I looked at was the work of Robert Bresson. I wouldn't flatter myself with a comparison, of course, but he's got some extraordinarily tense set pieces in his movies, particularly in *Pickpocket* and *A Man Escaped*. He's seldom given the credit for being a great thriller director. Not to denigrate the rich ideas within his films, but he's a master of sensational, low-key suspense scenes. I wasn't setting out to make *The Bourne Identity* here. The suspense had to feel realistic, based around character more than situation."

## 4. Embrace the divide between documentary and fiction

"For the two films I've made in the UK, I wanted to create a world that felt believable. In my instalment of the *Red Riding* trilogy, the world was delirious and nightmarish, but also credible. You want people to buy in to the on-screen dilemmas. The difference between documentaries and fiction features is quite a big one, not least because you have actors, but also because you have more control over what you show. That's why I like doing fiction films. You can create your own world, choose your own colours. *Man on Wire* was a very important film for me as it simultaneously had elements of fiction, genre and documentary. Each individual element enriches the others."

## 5. Lock down your aesthetic

"The way we started out on this project was that I invited our director of photography, Rob Hardy, and Jon Henson, the production designer, to Copenhagen, where I live. I spent a week with them and it became known as 'The Copenhagen Talks'. Our aim was to set out a tone and an aesthetic for the film we were trying to make. We weren't going for a gritty social-realist model with *Shadow Dancer*. We tried to make the camera part of the story. That decision was really influenced by Hitchcock, I guess. A lot of thought went in to how we should create this world. We wanted to make it both believable and a place we could call our own."

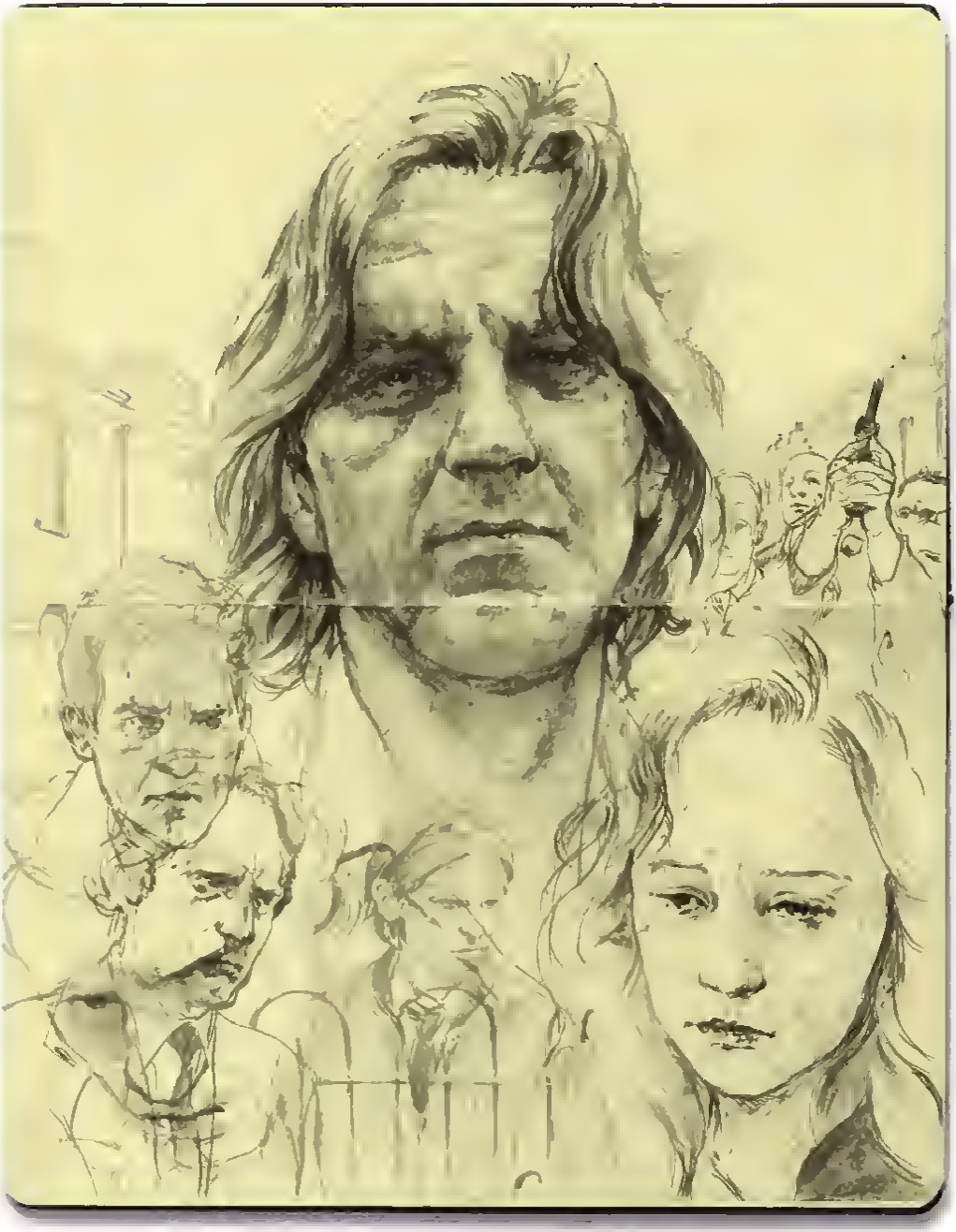
## 6. Strip things back

"In the original script, the film opened with an epic 'movie' chase involving motorbikes and helicopters, set on the London Underground. We just couldn't pull it off with our resources. So Tom and I talked about how we could create something with all the surprise and suspense of a big, fuck-off action sequence, but do it in a way that somehow felt more naturalistic. His original version was quite epic but quite conventional, so we boiled it down to gestures and paranoia.

"We didn't really have the right permissions to go and do what we were doing. It was all done for real. We just hopped on a Tube with real people and got Andrea to do what she did. Andrea and I had never worked together before, and there I was throwing her into this very difficult, real-life situation. She handled it so brilliantly. In that respect, it was real. We had no control over any of the trains or any of the carriages. We were just hopping on and hopping off and hoping for the best."

## 7. Follow your dreams

"I've been working on an idea for three years now. It's based on a dream diary that I found. A man wrote down his dreams and they were all about a woman he was obsessed with throughout his life. This was across 30 years of knowing her. So we get this thematic obsessive account of his love for this woman. I'm trying to sequence the dreams in a certain way so they tell a story of this affair. Whether it's ever going to be done and, more importantly, if it's going to be watchable. I just don't know. One is always looking for subject matter and trying to make that decision about which would be the best way to present it."



# Berberian Sound Studio

*Directed by* **PETER STRICKLAND**
*Starring* **TOBY JONES, COSIMO FUSCO, ANTONIO MANCINO**
*Released* **AUGUST 31**



No one saw it coming. Defying all predictability, Peter Strickland's 2009 debut *Katalin Varga* was an English film telling a Romanian-language rape/revenge story set to eclectic soundscapes by Nurse With Wound. Now, just as improbably, his follow-up is a bilingual tale of two halves (still with the odd snatch of Nurse With Wound for the sharp-eared) set in the claustrophobic world of audio post-production for a 1970s Italian horror. Except that *Berberian Sound Studio* is itself dressed in the same vividly hallucinatory *giallo* stylings, with a Lynchian twist.

The film opens with a reel-to-reel tape player starting up, but only the sound is sharp, with the impressionistic images taking their time to come into focus. Here, acoustics - and the ambiguities associated with them - will come to the fore, as sound engineer Gilderoy (Toby Jones) mixes the ADR, foley work and musical score for a brutal and clearly misogynistic film that we constantly hear but almost never see - even if the garish black-and-red opening credits to this film-within-a-film replace *Berberian Sound Studio*'s own title sequence. It will not be the first time that the boundaries between film and reality are breached - and the '*Silenzio*' sign that repeatedly flashes red whenever recording is taking place serves as a clear indicator, at least to those familiar with *Mulholland Drive*, that there will be more to this film than at first meets the eye (and ear).

Like the heroines of the *Suspiria*-like film he is working on, Gilderoy is lost in an environment that he does not fully comprehend. More used to children's television and local documentaries, he is the archetypically reserved Englishman out of his depth in Italy, with linguistic isolation only adding to his sense of alienation. Exploited by his hard-nosed producer Francesco (Cosimo Fusco), manipulated by the lecherous director Santini (Antonio Mancino), and treated with officious contempt by the production's secretary (Tonia Sotiropoulou), Gilderoy soon wearies of having both to listen to and help create endless recordings of female suffering, and is sustained only by his mother's letters from their home in idyllic Dorking.

Yet as the audio from one scene starts bleeding crosstalk into the next, and as the technician's life and the film on screen begin to merge, what Gilderoy sees, dreams and overlooks all blur into one paranoid nightmare of uneasy complicity. He may want out of the picture, but as Francesco insists, "It is just a film - you are part of it."

With all its classic *giallo* trappings, right down to the unseen projectionist's black leather gloves, *Berberian Sound Studio* seems to have an inevitably murderous narrative trajectory. But as its sensory overload never quite gives way to the expected sensationalism, Strickland disorients viewers with a sly meta-horror that reflects upon both the artifice that goes into genre films and the uncomfortable reality that can underlie their depiction of women. **ANTON BITEL**

**ANTICIPATION.** *"Nobody has seen this horror before."* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Layers its narrative strands to the same unsettling effect as its retreating anti-hero mixes sounds.* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Psychedelic aesthetics, psychogenic fugues - it is the disorienting giallo Lynch might have made.* **4**

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# Take This Waltz

*Directed by* **SARAH POLLEY**
*Starring* **MICHELLE WILLIAMS, SETH ROGEN, SARAH SILVERMAN**
*Released* **AUGUST 17**

"Life has a gap in it. It just does. You don't go crazy trying to fill it." So says a recovering alcoholic (played by a very watchable Sarah Silverman) in Sarah Polley's second feature. It strikes at the film's heart - whether the gap is between falling head over heels and into a more enduring love (or falling out of it altogether); between settling down and having kids; or between watching your spouse develop Alzheimer's and inch slowly towards the inevitable. That was the subject of *Away From Her*, Polley's impressive first feature, and here she approaches a much younger couple in crisis with an equally heartbreaking lyricism and intelligence.

Characters in *Take This Waltz* who don't mind the gap tend to come unstuck - not least its 28-year-old protagonist, Margot (a tomboyish, elfin Michelle Williams), a freelance journalist married to loveable, kind-hearted cookery writer Lou (Seth Rogen). When Margot meets an attractive stranger, Daniel (Luke Kirby), on her return from a business trip, she admits to a phobia of the period between check-in and take-off. "I'm afraid of connections... In airports." This metaphor, a little too on-the-nose, is one of several missteps in a film which is otherwise full of perceptive, funny observations about the nature of romantic love and the daily vicissitudes of the human heart.

Following a brief flirtation, Margot discovers Daniel is in fact a close neighbour. With temptation lurking literally yards away, cracks in Margot and Lou's loving marriage begin to emerge. Polley's camera frames their domestic set-up in revealing tableaux: the TV stares back at the watching couple, glazed with inertia and familiarity, in bed, the camera faces them square on, bearing down on them with mingled intimacy and claustrophobia. Margot's unspoken frustration tinges the couple's infantilising baby talk, a running pet joke evolves from, "I love you so much I'm going to... mash your head in with a potato masher" to, "I love you so much I'm going to... rape you with a knife until you bleed to death." The unconsummated passion between Daniel and Margot, who begin a chaste affair, is likewise subliminated, which creates a heightened eroticism expressed not through action but charged words, gestures and glances.

Set in Toronto, Polley's hometown, and infused with the over-saturated pastels of a sweltering summer in Margot's Boho neighbourhood, the film sometimes risks looking like a feature-length ad for Hipstamatic, and its attention to detail sometimes feels a little mannered (Daniel, for starters, is a rickshaw driver-cum-aspiring artist).

That said, there are moments of real poetry, including the dreamy impressionism of sequences showing Margot caught in the giddy oblivion of a fairground ride. When Polley finally deploys the Leonard Cohen song of the film's title, she risks being outshone by a more consummate Canadian artist, but this is a bold film, alive to its own ambiguities and supported by fine lead performances from Rogen and Williams. As in *Away From Her*, Polley confronts a 'gap' that most conventional dramas overlook altogether, and refuses to turn her head. **SOPHIE IVAN**

**ANTICIPATION.** *It's been six years since Polley's distinctive first feature, which set the bar high* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Though occasionally punctured by self-consciousness, this is emotionally layered, probing drama* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Committed and resonant,* Take This Waltz *gets under your skin - and feels a lot like the work of an auteur in the making* **4**


# God Bless America

*Directed by* **BORCAT GOLDTHWAIT**
*Starring* **JOEL MURRAY, TARA LYNNE BARR, MELINDA PAGE HAMILTON**
*Released* **JULY 4**



If you were one of the dozen-or-so souls who caught Bobcat Goldthwait's previous film, *World's Greatest Dad* – an acute satire of celebrity and hypocrisy wrapped around a gross-out teen suicide romp and delivered with the astringent kiss of a chemical burn – then you'll no doubt be hoping his new film, *God Bless America*, builds on this scabrous, off-beam comic worldview.

He's certainly broadened his creative canvas, taking as his subject the full-scale decomposition of American society, from work and family through to shiny-floor reality TV and the erosion of common courtesy. Withering polemical intent aside, though, Goldthwait has gnawed off more than he can chew. He has paid for the scope of his ambitions with a film that betrays a shocking lack of focus.

The smouldering ant under Goldthwait's misaligned magnifying glass is divorced salaryman Frank (Joel Murray). Living alone in a generic, tract-housing shithox, Frank is a genial sort who finds himself constantly assailed by the petty tyrannies, self-glorifying ignorance and crass, hateful values of a world – or, more specifically, an America – on the road to ruin. Frank's as mad as hell, and when he's unfairly sacked from his job and diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour, he decides he simply isn't going to take it any more.

Tooling up with heavy ordnance and hooking up with mouthy teen runaway Roxy (Tara Lynne Barr), Frank kicks the tires, starts the fires and takes to the road on a killing spree that turns out to be as scattergun as the film is scatterbrained.

*Falling Down* and *Natural Born Killers* are obvious touchstones, but lacking the spleen and desperation of the former or the overcranked psychotropic iconoclasm of the latter, *GBA* has neither impetus nor direction. Nor, it transpires, much by way of humour or insight.

Rather, we're treated to endless motel pit-stop whinges about such sophomoric, fish-in-a-barrel targets as intolerant shock-jocks, *American Idol* contestants, people who park inconsiderately, teens talking too loudly in cinemas and – for some reason – celebrity screenwriter Diablo Cody. Bull's-eyes don't get much bigger or fuzzier than these. And the Cody reference is especially eye-rolling, as Frank and Roxy proceed to pull apart the hip precocity of *Juno* with exactly the same kind of over-scripted, self-laudatory banter they're supposedly deriding.

If the dialogue drags, cinematically *GBA* is running on something close to empty. There's no sense of place informing the action. And if we have no feel for where Frank is from, how are we to understand where he's headed? Perhaps the blank, featureless direction is itself hinting at the bland interchangeability of the modern American landscape. But that's probably crediting the film with a subtlety it simply doesn't deserve.

Goldthwait shows a knack for pin-pointing the sulphurous hues within the kaleidoscopic rainbow of alienation and frustration, but has sadly failed to paint any of them black. **ADAM LEE DAVIES**

**ANTICIPATION.** *After the success of his last film, hopes are Rocky Mountain High for a Panic in Detroit* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Goldthwait blazes down Route 66 with the Tupelo Blues but makes a real dog's breakfast (in America) of it* **2**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *As you Harlem Shuffle out of the theatre, it's less a Hooray for Hollywood than a New York Mining Disaster* **1**

# The Three Stooges

*Directed by* **PETER FARRELLY, BOBBY FARRELLY**
*Starring* **SEAN HAYES, CHRIS DIAMANTOPOULOS, WILL SASSO**
*Released* **AUGUST 22**

If turning in a reasonable facsimile of the original Three Stooges was the goal, then the Farrelly brothers' latest film is at least a partial success. Sean Hayes, Chris Diamantopoulos and Will Sasso nail both the voices and slapstick gestures of Larry, Moe and Curly. But no matter the reverence that the Farrellys show towards their source material, it's difficult to find all the pratfalling, bad puns and mild gross out gags engaging, even over the course of the film's relatively brief (if seemingly endless) 90-minute runtime.

Unleashing our trio of holy fools into the world after 35 years in a Catholic orphanage, the Farrellys follow these overgrown children as they naively negotiate the bafflements of modern life while trying to raise the money needed to keep the orphanage afloat.

The film bears an odd relationship to the contemporary landscape, which makes sense, since most of its frisson comes from the Stooges' status as walking anachronisms. Larry, Moe and Curly have no grasp of popular culture and their brand of humour hasn't dated particularly well. But the Farrellys' attempts to satirise modern society are as unimaginative and ill-conceived as the movie's unfortunate baby-pissing set-piece, and as tiresome as the endless eye-poking gags scored to dreary sound-effects.

When Moe joins the cast of a popular reality TV show and becomes a national sensation, the film seems to be reaching hard for relevance. Yet even as the head Stooge puts his obnoxious co-stars in their place, there's little joy to be found in taking pot-shots at cultural phenomena already parodied to death elsewhere. The Farrellys, however, save their most fatal misfire for the finale, and a mawkish grab for unearned pathos. **ANDREW SCHENKER**

**ANTICIPATION.** *Of all the iconic American screen figures, the Three Stooges are probably the least deserving of a twenty-first-century reboot* **2**

**ENJOYMENT.** *The Farrelly brothers certainly seem to be enjoying themselves, but chances are high that you won't* **2**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *This one barely sticks in the memory. The quirkier it's forgotten, the better* **1**

REVIEWS

# Samsara

*Directed by* **RON FRICKE**
*Released* **AUGUST 31**

Shot in breathtaking 70mm in 26 different countries, and supercharged with some astonishingly innovative sound design, this follow-up to director and cinematographer Ron Fricke's 1992 film *Baraka* is an immersive non-narrative symphony that explores the links between nature, humanity and the cycle of life.

Distinguished by gorgeous visuals and rich colours, *Samsara* sweeps by in a mesmeric image stream of man and machine, destruction and creation, life and death. Among a catalogue of contenders, its most staggering moment is a sequence shot at Hajj in which millions of Islamic pilgrims whirl like nail filings in accelerated time-lapse around the Kaaba obelisk, here rendered as a giant, glowing, spiritual magnet.

Under retrospective scrutiny, some of the film's connections feel a little trite: the mass killing of chickens segues into a passage featuring corpulent American diners, for example. But such are the persuasive rhythms of the editing, it's hard not to just go with the pulsing flow. There's an intelligence at work, too. One extraordinary sequence subverts observational detachment to depict a teacher (played by an actor) undergoing a dramatically heightened nervous breakdown. To the sounds of a clattering, percussive soundtrack, he constructs a *papier-mâché* head, and proceeds to destroy it while wearing it.

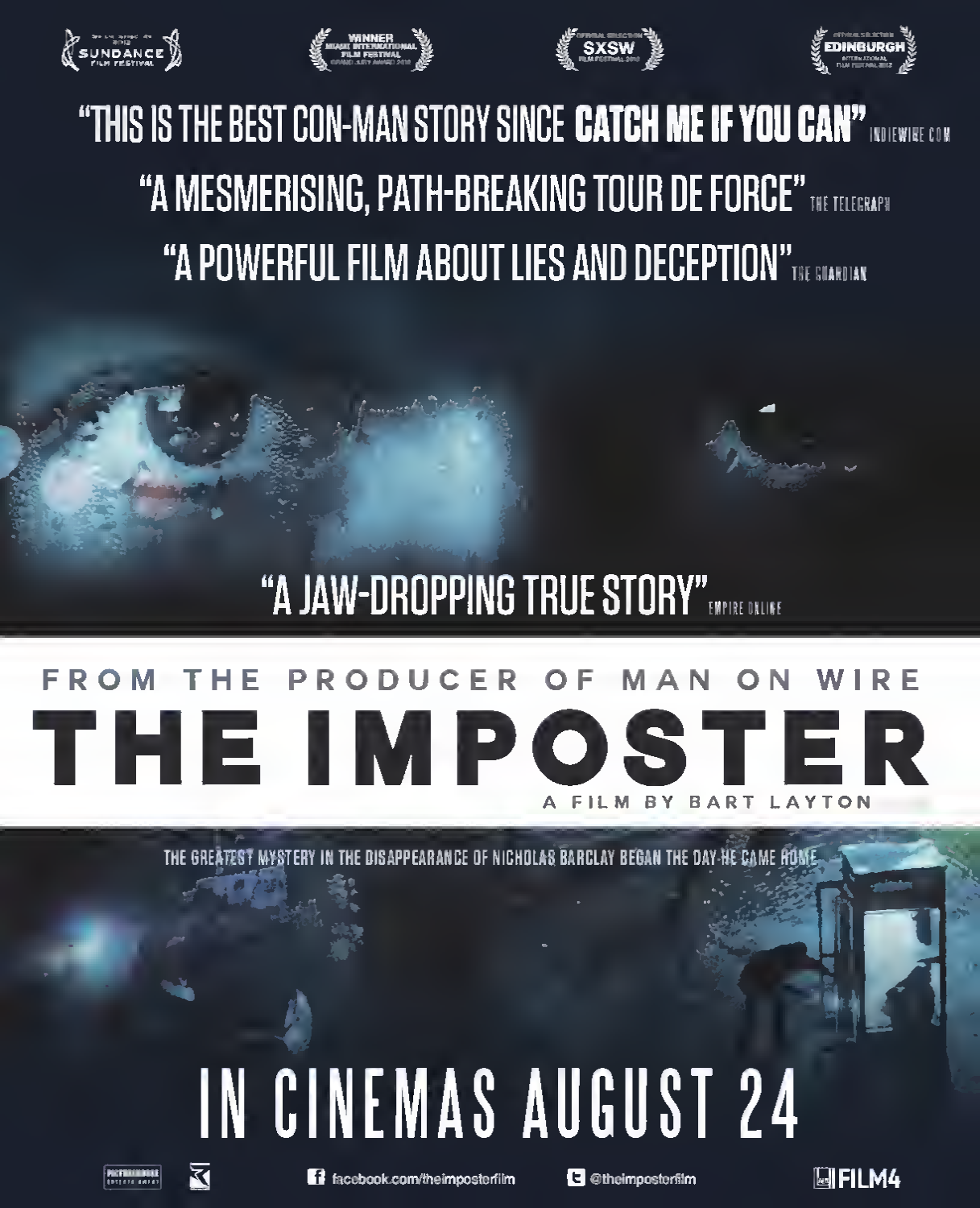
It's a horrifyingly funny moment, unexpectedly redolent of the work by New York performance art troupe The Wooster Group, and it also riffs playfully on the corrosive stress of modern living. By all rights, this segment should be jarring. Instead, it works as a smartly reflexive comment on the film's own observational artificiality. It's just as constructed as many of the wide-eyed anthropological shots involving 'real' people.

The lack of narrative suggests that *Samsara* won't be for everyone, but it's hard to think of a recent work that's attained profundity through such simplicity. Its melding of technical wizardry with soulful observation furnishes a new way of viewing the world and achieves the feat of making our planet seem simultaneously overwhelming and intimate. **ASHLEY CLARK**

**ANTICIPATION.** *It's been a long wait since* Baraka **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *A treat for eyes, ears, brain and soul* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *The sensation wears off slightly, but it's still staggering, moving, even humbling* **3**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# The Amazing Spider-Man

*Directed by* **MARC WEBB**
*Starring* **ANDREW GARFIELD, EMMA STONE, RHYS IFANS**
*Released* **JULY 3**

There's a scene in *The Amazing Spider-Man* that inadvertently captures the magic and cynicism that coalesce in the summer blockbuster. Spider-Man (Andrew Garfield) has just seen off a giant lizard on the Williamsburg Bridge in a jaw-dropping display of CG wizardry. Now a child is trapped in a burning car dangling over the river and our hero must go to the rescue. As the flames creep closer, Spidey removes his mask and hands it to the boy. "Put this on," he says, "it'll give you strength." And as the trembling child pulls the mask over his head — *becoming* Spider-Man — in a moment of ecstatic transfiguration — you can practically hear the cash tills registering a million extra sales of official merchandise.

The uneasy splicing of art and commerce has long been typical of Hollywood's tentpole event movies, but it stands out in *The Amazing Spider-Man* precisely because Marvel's comic-book do-over is such an atypical film in almost every other respect.

There is, of course, the question of context. Where Superman went 19 years between iterations, and Batman managed eight, it's been just five years since Tobey Maguire hung up his web-slingers. Nevertheless, *(500) Days of Summer* director Marc Webb has started from scratch, recruiting smartly from the ranks of teen idols-in-waiting and reinvesting in his story some of the heart, humour and humanity absent from Sam Raimi's unwitting finale.

So here we go again — Peter Parker, Uncle Ben, spider bites and superpowers, an origin story but not as we know it. There's the mysterious disappearance of Peter's father, a scientist working on a formula to splice animal genes into human subjects. And there's a new love interest, Gwen Stacy (Emma Roberts), a classmate of Parker's who moonlights (implausibly) as an intern at genetics giant Oscorp, where Dr Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans) dreams of regenerating his arm from lizard DNA despite the increasingly capricious demands of old man Osborn himself.

For all its quirks, this opening act is the film's most laborious — the recipe may be new but the ingredients are stale. Still, there are hints that what's to come will be worth the wait. The spider-bite scene is creepy, and Peter's exploration of his powers showcases an earthy aesthetic grounded by DP John Schwartzman's naturalistic palette of dense greys and sharp blacks that does much to make Parker's journey (literal and metaphorical) more credible.

And then, finally, Spider-Man takes to the air, the film takes flight, and Webb's vision comes soaring into its own. For all the liberal use of CGI — in the transformation of Connors into the Lizard, in conjuring the playground roofscapes of New York, in the climactic skyscraper showdown between good and good-gone-awry — what's most impressive about *The Amazing Spider-Man* is how rooted in reality it is. Webb has one big advantage over Raimi - 3D - and he uses it to create a sense of scale, to show how tiny Peter Parker is against the backdrop of this city and these events, and how, courageously, he steps out into its midst and earns the right to become Spider-Man.

Even as Parker wrestles with his responsibilities, Spider-Man discovers his power with a ferocious sense of freedom. The camera responds, peering precipitously over ledges, free-falling, flashing from first-person to slo-mo. Webb demonstrates an unexpected fluency for action cinema, effortlessly integrating the real and the computer-rendered, giving Spidey a definite style and muscularity in the film's fight sequences.

As for Garfield, he may be too pretty to play the nerd, but his Spidey is a more organic, more insectile creation than we've seen before, while his Peter Parker is seductive and sympathetic in the film's more intimate moments. With a mega-watt smile to go with the newly bulging biceps, this is the stuff of movie stardom.

There's the usual Stan Lee cameo nonsense, of course. The underwritten female role. Moments where the film adheres too closely to Raimi's original (what, *more* blue-collar New Yorkers coming to Spidey's rescue?). And an emotional coda that reeks of focus-testing.

But *The Amazing Spider-Man* is a major success story. Webb's film stands comparison with Raimi's but does so much more than that, too. It creates its own mythology, its own magic, and it's own future. Spider-Man is dead. Long live Spider-Man. **MATT BOCHENSKI**

**ANTICIPATION** *Didn't Sam Raimi make this already?* **3**

**ENJOYMENT** *Sam who?* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT** *There's a new Webb-slinger in town — and he's here to stay.* **4**

*Interview by* ADAM LEE DAVIES *Photography by* PAUL WILLOUGHBY

# Marc Webb

INTERVIEW

Former music video director Marc Webb's first film, *(500) Days of Summer*, starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Zooey Deschanel as a pair of star-crossed, jangle-pop-obsessed misfits, was one of the surprise hits of 2009. But Webb has now taken leave of the kooky indie scene to direct the special effects megahit that is *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Seemingly unfazed by the transition, he talks with *LWLies* about risk, *Jaws* and not getting hurt... yet.

**LWLies: It's slightly unusual for a studio to risk such a valuable commodity on a director of a winsome indie film. But how much of a risk was it to your own career to take on such a big responsibility?**

Marc Webb: I'm not sure if I think about it in those terms, although I think by nature I'm a bit of a risk-taker. It would've been really easy to turn this down, but I thought it was such a great opportunity because there are so many stories in the comics, and I had a different inflection of the character that I wanted to explore. Everything is a risk. Walking out of your house in the morning is a risk. But you can't confuse anxiety for danger. I don't think there was ever a threat to my person. Not yet, anyway...

**No one's really seen it yet, though.**

Indeed. Let's see...

**Did you find the size and scale of the production at all daunting?**

Well, there are a lot more moving parts. There's a lot more people. There's a lot more of a management component to it and it takes a lot of stamina. But in a way it just consumes your life. It becomes habitual. It's kinda fun... I had a great... It's fun. It's terrible! It's a lot of work... It's mind-numbing and tedious... but then it's also exciting and thrilling.

**Did you ever have fears that this reboot was coming too hard on the heels of the Sam Raimi films?**

Sure. There were moments when I wondered what people's disposition would be, and I understand why people might be cynical or sceptical about that... about the filmmaking process in Hollywood. But it's proving to be the case that once people see the film and see what we were trying to achieve they become more interested and willing to accept it on its own terms. And... well, we'll see ultimately if that's true, but at the end of the day *I* was curious about it. I asked myself, 'Would I want to see this movie?' Absolutely... I'd be the first person in line.

**What do you feel *The Amazing Spider-Man* brings to the blockbuster?**

What was fun for me... What I wanted to do is, despite all the action, I wanted to make that small movie and I wanted to find the spontaneity. There's so much pressure when you're doing a big movie to get the day done on time and make everything rigid and everything exactly right and plan every detail, but I wanted to have that spontaneity and looseness that I love in independent cinema and inject that into a big movie. The greatest blockbusters always have really good character work. Take *Jaws*... JJ Abrams talks about this... and look at the father-son relationship, that is as good a human drama as you're ever going to find. Same goes for *Close Encounters*. Those scenes where Richard Dreyfuss is with his family and he's breaking into tears... that's just great fucking drama.

# Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry

*Directed by* **ALISON KLAYMAN**
*Starring* **AI WEIWEI, DANQING CHEN, YING GAO**
*Released* **AUGUST 10**

What is the biggest difference between cats and humans? You can hear Ai Weiwei's take on this specialist question early on in this absorbing documentary portrait of the controversial Chinese artist. We won't spoil things by revealing the answer, but the logic behind his response reveals the sideways creativity and sense of sly political resistance that has made Weiwei one of China's leading cultural figures.

Fêted both at home and abroad, Weiwei helped design the iconic Bird's Nest Stadium for the Beijing Olympics, and made news here by covering the vast floor space of the Tate Modern Turbine Hall with 100m porcelain sunflower seeds. But his art has increasingly taken on a political dimension, and he has emerged in recent years as one of the most prominent critics of the Communist authorities.

A deserving subject for a feature-length documentary, then, and journalist-turned-filmmaker Alison Klayman generally does a fine job in conveying his importance. Following the artist in the lead-up to a couple of big international exhibitions, this is a fascinating account of Weiwei's working methods. Like Damien Hirst, the 55-year-old is more of an ideas man than hands-on artist – overseeing teams of workers who actually produce the large-scale exhibits that figure in his recent shows. As he matter-of-factly explains to Klayman: "I mainly make decisions."

But these decisions have lately adopted a belligerent stance towards the governing regime, an attitude that found a huge audience when Weiwei started tweeting his defiance to a community of dedicated acolytes. Investigating the deaths of thousands of children in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Weiwei was beaten senseless by local cops and had to have surgery a few weeks later.

Weiwei documented this, and his subsequent attempts to charge the officers who attacked him, shouting as loudly as possible online about this official attempt to silence him. A true dissenter for the age of social networking, Weiwei practices political protest as performance art (or maybe the other way round) – a point compellingly made by this documentary's countless shots of Weiwei compulsively tweeting the progress of his official complaint towards the cop who beat him up.

It's impressive stuff, and the film leaves you with a strong admiration for Weiwei's quiet bravery. Unsettled by his vocal opposition, the regime has tried subtler ways to suppress his views, most recently detaining him for 81 days for tax evasion. Klayman is there, with her camera, when he returns from custody, his customary optimism momentarily dimmed. But he's soon back tweeting, back worrying his mum, who at one point is poignantly filmed expressing concerns about the risks of so much protesting. "What can you do?" asks Weiwei with a shrug.

*Never Sorry* isn't the most sophisticated of films. With the exception of a few gossipy tidbits – notably the married Weiwei's affair with a younger woman that produces his first son – this portrait doesn't probe the artist's darker aspects. At times, it even plays like a campaign video for Weiwei's views. Still, these are views worth listening to, and expressed at real personal risk by this remarkable man. Biased though it may be, *Never Sorry* has nothing to apologise for. **EDWARD LAWRENSON**

**ANTICIPATION** *China's leading contemporary artist reveals all – or does he?* **3**

**ENJOYMENT** *Fascinating account of Weiwei's practice and politics that gives centre stage to his charismatic personality* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT** *It's not the most rounded of views, but this is still a stirring portrait of one of the leading critics of the Chinese authorities* **3**

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# Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present

*Directed by* **MATTHEW AKERS**
*Starring* **MARINA ABRAMOVIC, DAVID BLAINE, JAMES FRANCO**
*Released* **JULY 6**

For three months in 2010, the lauded, Belgrade-born 'grandmother of performance art', Marina Abramovic, sat in silence at a simple wooden table and invited onlookers to join her, one at a time, and look into her eyes. She became the living centrepiece of a major retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

At 63, Abramovic remains statuesque, smooth-skinned, poised, weapon-like. But director Matthew Akers also captures her vulnerable side, counterpointing the fearless manner in which she offers herself up to her audience. Her career spans three decades, in which time Abramovic has pushed the limits of her body, repeatedly experimenting with states of consciousness and the mystic, ritualistic origins of performance art. Most disturbing of all is her fascination with knives, or the footage of a piece in which she entered a burning star-shaped object and passed out due to the lack of oxygen.

Akers makes sense of Abramovic's enigmatic presence, contextualising her performance at MoMA with clips from her earlier work and candid interviews with the artist herself, one of which takes the form of a characteristically bizarre conversation with magician David Blaine, a fellow exponent of conceptual stunt endurance. While the central subject of Akers' film – a chronicle of the performance at MoMA – may veer towards the tedious, the powerful aura of conviction and intensity exuded by Abramovic makes for utterly beguiling viewing. The charged glances exchanged between artist and audience are heightened via Akers' close-ups of eyes, intimately synthesising the live experience of the event on film.

The most extraordinary thing about *The Artist is Present* is the frequent shift from performance space to life outside it. We see Abramovic before and after her long days in the museum, shoulders relaxing, robe gathered up, flashing a nervous smile. This comes as a relief not only for the artist, but for viewers. She exits the self-induced trance-like state and enters the real world again, something deliberately absent from the performance itself.

We also see her working with a group of young artists as part of a retreat, preparing them for a re-enactment of five historical pieces that flesh-out the retrospective. Refreshingly, Abramovic's teaching methods are unpretentious, direct and charming. In one scene, we observe her enthusiastically cooking some sort of broth for her students before skipping off with their mobile phones in a wicker basket.

At the end of the film, we witness the closing moments of Abramovic's MoMA performance. She moves forward off her chair, still in a crouched position, before slowly straightening her back, her eyes darting about the museum space. The audience applauds warmly and Abramovic beams in a white dress, exiting her own self-portrait and leaving her legacy behind.

If the intention of Akers' film is to reach a wider audience, it should achieve this aim. It's not a biographical exercise, nor is it an homage to the artist – its appeal is more universal than that. The question is whether or not you have the stamina to pull up a chair at Abramovic's table. **DAVINA QUINLIVAN**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANTICIPATION.** *There aren't many films that feature an artist staring across a table at strangers for eight hours* | **3** |
| **ENJOYMENT.** *Surprisingly effective documentary, smoothly structured and entertaining* | **4** |
| **IN RETROSPECT.** *Abramovic is nothing less than magnetic* | **4** |

# Searching for Sugar Man

*Directed by* **MALIK BENDJELLOUL**
*Starring* **MALIK BENDJELLOUL, RODRIGUEZ**
*Released* **JULY 27**

'Sugar Man, won't you hurry / 'Cos I'm tired of these scenes / For a blue coin won't you bring back / All those colours to my dreams.' Four lines you've probably never sung in the shower. Or anywhere else, for that matter. If you happen to be South African, however, these lyrics carry a particular emotional resonance. That's according to the two music lovers at the centre of Swedish director Malik Bendjelloul's engaging Bok-rock-doc. Together, these men – one record store owner; one ex-journo – buff the legacy of enigmatic Detroit singer/songwriter Rodriguez (aka 'Sugar Man'), whose commercially disastrous debut LP *Cold Facts* became a cultural phenomenon in South Africa in the 1970s.

The Stones? Elvis? Rodriguez was bigger than them both. But it wasn't just the catchy riffs and craggy timbre that made Sugar Man a hit; his melancholic urban poetry and anti-establishment ideology struck a chord with a generation of young white South Africans desperate to throw back the apartheid curtain. Yet despite Rodriguez's songs being adopted as national protest anthems, the man behind the music was a mystery. Rumour fuelled the myth. Some said he committed suicide, squeezing a .38 in his mouth mid-way through a set. As others had it, it was lighter fluid and a match that sparked the legend.

It's a sweet hook – one Rodriguez himself would be proud of – that signals a tonal shift from hazy fan eulogy to nourish page-turner, as numerous interviewees retrace their steps, feeling their way towards a few basic truths from the late 1990s. To reveal anything more would be to undermine Bendjelloul's nimble (if talking heads-heavy) retelling of an elaborate, frequently astonishing true story. Like Rodriguez's Dylan-esque brand of working-class folk-rock, *Sugar Man* is a film best discovered and experienced first-hand. **ADAM WOODWARD**

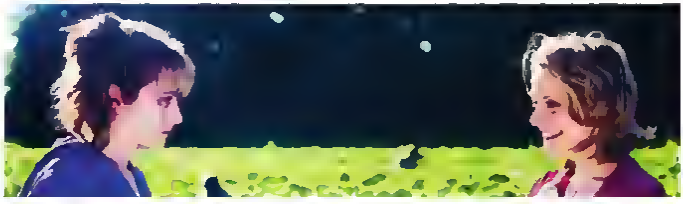
**ANTICIPATION.** *Sure, The Apprentice is a chuckle. But do we really need a feature-length biography of Britain's foremost celebrity business magnate?* **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *An absorbing and uplifting doc that rivals* Catfish *for sheer stranger-than-fiction thrills. Great soundtrack, too.* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *'Accessing iTunes Store...'* **3**

# Strawberry Fields

*Directed by* **FRANCES LEA**
*Starring* **ANNA MADELEY, CHRISTINE BOTTOMLEY, EMUN ELLIOTT**
*Released* **JULY 4**



Hot, lazy summers, the kind that make people go brawling, go falling into bed with each other and maybe go a little crazy. If you find it hard to remember a time when we had that kind of weather, Frances Lea's *Strawberry Fields* offers an intoxicating reminder.

Two sisters, Gillian (Anna Madeley) and Emily (Christine Bottomley), start working as pickers on a strawberry farm. It's casual work. Very casual. Time is spent smoking joints and having sex. Gillian came there to escape her sister's manipulative control. Emily, meanwhile, follows her and immediately starts trying to destroy her new relationship with Emun Elliott's charming Scottish drifter, Kev.

Bottomley is darkly compelling as the troubled sibling, provoking Kev into rages driven as much by lust as fury. Elliot ricochets back an equally engaging performance, though poor Madeley gets caught in the crossfire.

She's a good actress, but playing the shy, repressed character is harder and a lot less fun than being the bad boy or the bitch. Both sisters display an infantile quality, but while Bottomley can pass it off as part of her mild insanity, Madeley's awkward naivety can feel clunky and overcooked.

According to Lea, *Strawberry Fields* was inspired by *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and there are definitely moments when the games being played create a similar electricity. Elsewhere, though, the theatricality is forced. Token gestures are made at filling out a back-story, but the characters mostly exist in an oddly dreamy void.

As a rites-of-passage movie, it also seems strange that Lea has cast actors in their early thirties. These characters only come together for a few days, and even allowing for a little midsummer madness, their volatile and intense feelings for one another can seem a little absurd. They would have been far more convincing coming from teenagers stumbling painfully through these emotions for the first time. **JESSICA LAMBERT**

**ANTICIPATION.** *Tennessee Williams in the English countryside sounds wonderful.* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *A few false notes but the dark rivalries and erotic tension are captivating.* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Beautifully shot and mostly well executed. Lea and her cast are worth looking out for.* **3**

# In Your Hands

*Directed by* **LOLA DOILLON**
*Starring* **KRISTIN SCOTT THOMAS, PIO MARMAÏ, JEAN-PHILIPPE ÉCOFFEY**
*Released* **JULY 20**

There's nothing groundbreaking about the premise. A middle-class doctor kidnapped by an unstable patient with a grudge. A victim who grows to love her captor. A captor who grows to love his victim. Or does she? Or does he? Or do they?

Every time you think Lola Doillon's claustrophobic yet strangely lightweight drama has reached a firm conclusion, it pulls a bait-and-switch and leaves you instead with yet another would-be provocative twist.

As narrative cinema goes, there's nothing necessarily wrong with this, but it does make it harder to invest in the emotional reality of misused medic, Anna (Kristin Scott Thomas). It's telling that the film's opening 15 minutes are its most effective, attempting to make you feel something rather than cheating you into thinking something. Anna escapes from what it later transpires was a days-long ordeal. Shell-shocked, she makes her way home. The tiny realities of returning to life as she left it following this incomprehensible trauma (the voicemails that have built up on her phone are a resonant detail) are evoked in brisk, subtle strokes.

One wishes the film retained its focus on this period, but Doillon instead uses it only as a framing device for flashbacks to Anna's time as a prisoner. Her captor, Yann (Pio Marmaï), is an unstable man out to avenge his wife, who died in ambiguous circumstances. Giving his character a sympathetic motive is presumably designed to offset the viciousness with which he treats Anna, but he's such a one-note brute that his reasoning barely registers.

What's worse is his abrupt transformation into a plausible romantic hero. The emotional dynamics of Stockholm syndrome deserve a more thorough exploration than they receive here, where whiplash-inducing u-turns render the entire third act dimly ludicrous. Perhaps this is how the syndrome really works, but fidelity to reality is not an excuse for a failure to convince on film. **EMMA DIBDIN**

**ANTICIPATION.** *Familiar premise, but the compact cast and psychological focus intrigues* **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *A compelling study of a kidnapping that gives way to melodrama* **2**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Kristin Scott Thomas impresses, but the third act turns everything to mush* **2**

REVIEWS

# Detachment

*Directed by* **TONY KAYE**
*Starring* **ADRIEN BRODY, SAMI GAYLE, MARCIA GAY HARDEN**
*Released* **JULY 13**

In *Lake of Fire*, Tony Kaye's 2006 abortion documentary, the British director brought a fierce intelligence to a politically sensitive subject. With *Detachment*, he's attempted to repeat the trick, this time in the fictional framework of America's failing public school system.

Adrien Brody gives a typically lugubrious performance as substitute teacher Henry Barthes. Drafted into an embattled school, he is embroiled in the long, slow retreat of teaching standards. It's a situation made worse by economic crisis, political interference and classrooms of kids who have learned to give up on themselves before society does.

Kaye has employed every visual embellishment he can think of to bring this world to life. Violent chalkboard animations, abstract dream sequences and documentary cut-aways all punctuate the narrative, while dialogue scenes are pointedly framed and self-consciously edited.

These devices aren't to be confused with *ideas*, however. There's very little room for those in a film that rejects nuance for a series of worst-case-scenario scare stories. While Kaye's instincts as a director have always been provocative, here they fail him. His intention isn't to analyse the systemic failings of US schools; it's to batter the audience into submission. But there's only so much misery that can be shoved down your throat before you choke.

And for all that *Detachment* affects the air of an art film, it's beholden to the most toxic cliches of the genre: the aggressive kid transformed by 'sir', the staff as fucked-up as their pupils; the teary breakdowns and tenuous redemptions. And all of it rendered with an ad man's eye for style. In one particularly egregious scene, Kaye shoots a young girl's suicide with all the cold beauty and emotional absence of a car commercial.

With Carl Lund's script lifting liberally from the *Dawson's Creek* school of sixth-form psychology, the film's flaws overshadow decent performances from Brody and Sami Gayle that briefly threaten to rescue it. Pixie-featured, tough but brittle, Gayle in particular makes a convincingly vulnerable young woman whose fate provides *Detachment* with its one authentic grace note. **MATT BOCHENSKI**

**ANTICIPATION.** *After the development hell of* Black Water Transit, *it's good to have Tony Kaye back in cinemas* **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *A film every bit as troubled as the characters it portrays* **2**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *It's a vaguely elegant brute of a film, but a long way from Kaye's best* **2**

# El Bulli: Cooking in Progress

*Directed by* **GEREON WETZEL**
*Starring* **FERRAN ADRIÀ, ORIOL CASTRO, EDUARD XATRUCH**
*Released* **JULY 27**



When German writer/director Gereon Wetzel started shooting a documentary about world-beating Catalonian restaurant El Bulli in 2008, did he know that its star, Ferran Adrià, was publishing a book of culinary secrets that year? The book offers insights into how to construct your own liquorice-infused jelly lasagne and pine nut marshmallows. The film shows us men in white coats mumbling about cherimoya and matsutake with little explanation about what's actually going on.

The problem with *El Bulli: Cooking In Progress* is that its subjects are bent double over fragments of vacuumised vegetable, and the triple Michelin star-winning Adrià is withdrawn to the point of misanthropy. When his minions address him, he stares moodily into the middle distance. When they offer him a morsel they've spent all morning preparing, he stares impassively at them for what seems like a minute before delivering his terse verdict. "It's simply bad," he says of one experiment. "Don't give me anything that's not good."

There's much to learn over the course of 100 minutes, and if you're the sort who boils easy-cook pasta every day for lunch, the artistic rigour with which Adrià sculpts his dishes will come as a revelation. The narrative starts at the end of one season at the restaurant, with cutlery and appliances being shrink-wrapped, and ends at the beginning of the next. In between, Adrià and his team spend six months conducting 'research' on new textures, combinations of flavours and ways of presenting it all.

There are rules. Last year, we learn, foam was forbidden, as Adrià previously pioneered the idea of turning unlikely foodstuffs into molecules of air. This season, certain tastes must be experimented with, like kaki (Japanese persimmon) and sweet potato, which is juiced, fried, emulsified, turned into biscuits, and finally makes it into the menu as a species of gnocchi. "At the moment," Adrià says from the testing kitchen, "what matters is whether something is magical and whether it opens up a new path." Later, he will work on making it actually taste good.

Oriol Castro opens up one new path when he tosses some ice onto his plate of gravy in a cheap restaurant, and comes up with the idea of a vinaigrette studded with ice pellets and served with mini tangerines. A French sommelier is credited with giving the team a fresh direction when he starts riffing on a spider diagram of scents he's concocted. He talks about how cardamom and bergamot together smell like Muscat. Eucalyptus, fennel and yuzu (a sour Asian mandarin) are also discussed.

All this is tantalising, the full 30-course menu shown in stills at the end of the film – crystallised Parmesan, veal cartilage, pine seedlings, blossoms, bone marrow tartar – looks sublime. And it's good that someone managed to document the secretive back rooms at El Bulli before it closed in July last year. But it's a slow, repetitive work with too many shots that feel like filler. The food is artful. The film? Not so much. **JESS HOLLAND**

**ANTICIPATION.** *A peek behind hallowed gastronomic doors? Yes please* **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Chopping, frying, tasting... A snooze-bouche...* **2**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Yes, the food looks amazing. No, you won't be buying a vacuumiser* **2**

Words by ADAM LEE DAVIES

# Lunch Wagon Girls

DIRECTED BY
Ernest Pintoff

STARRING
Pamela Bryant, Rosanne Katon, Candy Moore

1981


TRAILERS
Q-Factor, Track Meet, The Lynching of Lollipop Jonny

CHERRYPICK
*"She's got 'Early American' features – like Cochise coming through a hairdryer."*



If as French chancer Jean-Luc Godard has it, all you need to kickstart a movie is a gun and a girl then surely using simple mathematics if you were to multiply the girl by three and subtract the gun for a shiny new catering truck, the resulting film grows exponentially in quality That, at least, seems to be the groggy blueprint behind *Lunch Wagon Girls*, a film that offers a freewheelin' mystery tour through the ass menagerie of dopers, no-hopers, grifters, drifters and cops of a downscale, proto-Tarantino LA.

The film follows three gamine, clothing-averse centrefold types who inherit a lunch wagon. Plot-wise that's it, until a late flurry insists they unwittingly and believe us, it's unwitting foil both a jewel robbery and an entirely separate bullion heist occurring at the same time They are subsequently chased around the dusty canyons of the San Fernando Valley by a fur coat-clad hitwoman who resembles Joan Crawford's reanimated corpse. Pack that out with a sidebar concerning a talent show, the New Wave rock stylings of one-hit wonders Missing Persons and their song 'Mental Hopscotch', and you've got a so-so VHS shelf-filler to slot between *Gas Pump Girls* and *Hamburger: The Motion Picture*

But there's a surprisingly infectious mood at play within *LWG* that elevates it far above such comparable sex-comedy/fried mince-based fare Indeed, what else would you expect of the producers behind *One-Armed Boxer II*, *Knockers Up* and *Dynamite Chicken*?

Idle conjecture this may be, but the shooting schedule of *LWG* appears to have been wholly timed around the relative largesse afforded by blind spots in the California Highway Patrol's morning shift-change patterns This not only allows the film to sparkle with the star-spangled early morning sunshine that warmed the hikes of *The Bad News Bears*, Adrian Lyne's *Foxes* and even *Boogie Nights* (all similarly shot in and around the San Fernando Valley), but also results in a movie that's infused with insane summertime bounce and devil-may-care traffic violations.

This is seat o' the pants Roger Corman filmmaking at its finest, where plot is decreed by the discovery, loan or gambling debt pay-off of an outré vehicle/grundy effects reel/haunted guitar Where character is dictated by whatever passing non-actor can fit into the pre-existing costumes, and where the setting is any flyblown strip of demilitarised swampland or stretch of featureless Californian outback. Anywhere, that is, that doesn't require a filming permit.

In his caustic Hollywood memoir *Set Up Joke, Set Up, Joke*, producer Rob Long summed up his experience of Tinseltown during the '80s by recounting a typical meeting with a studio executive of the time. 'You could go into an office on any lot in town and say, "I've got 40 pages of script about some kids who inherit a surfing academy, the keys to a condemned beach house and Dan Aykroyd for four days in June", and you'd have a green light before you'd even finished your pitch.'

Long's example is, of course, an apocryphal movie. But it is nonetheless one we have all, in some piecemeal form or another, seen If it wasn't a beach house it was the aforementioned haunted guitar And if it wasn't surfing, it was some bootless road trip or last-act, must-win roller derby Or a lunch wagon.

But Dan Aykroyd? Yeah, it was always him

# Le Petit Nicolas

*Directed by* **LAURENT TIRARD**
*Starring* **MAXIME GODART, VALÉRIE LEMERCIER, KAD MERAD**
*Released* **AUGUST 24**

Back in 2005, publisher Phaidon released some plush English editions of *Le Petit Nicolas*, a best-selling series of French children's books which began their run in 1959. Part of the charm of writer René Goscinny's tales of a scampish schoolboy and his chums is derived from artist Jean-Jacques Sempé's captivating illustrations, which this film's Franco-Belgian producers have sensibly declined to emulate, instead creating a world full of colour and incident.

From the opening moment when the boys pose for an old-fashioned school photo, it's clear we're in that world of childhood cherished by conservatives – the one that never really existed. The vignettes of Goscinny's originals are here given form in Nicolas' fear that he's about to get a little brother. His schoolmates' attempts to help him include a scheme inspired by Goscinny's own Asterix books.

The film happily eschews *Amélie*-like winsomeness – the kids stay largely on the right side of cute – and for the most part, director Laurent Tirard encourages his cast to pass up desperate mugging for deadpan glances. Nicolas' parents (played by Valérie Lemercier and Kad Merad) may not have got the memo, but Sandrine Kiberlain (so great in 2009's *Mademoiselle Chambon*) hits the right notes as the boys' teacher, despite the adults having less to work with than the kids.

Tirard is currently working on the latest Asterix adventure and was the writer of rom-com *I Do*, starring Charlotte Gainsbourg and Alain Chabat, who contributes to this script. Much care has gone into this delicate creation, from the lovely title sequence inspired by Sempé's original drawings, through Klaus Badelt's sprightly soundtrack, to cameos from such veterans of French cinema as Michel Galabru and Anémone.

*Le Petit Nicolas* may be too wilfully anachronistic for young tastes, and it may only be of interest to those non-French speakers who forked out for Phaidon's plush books. But those happy few are in for a treat. **OMER ALI**

**ANTICIPATION.** *It's that old conundrum: how to bring a much loved character to the big screen?* **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *A diverting alternative to more high-octane kiddie fare* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Needs sharper dialogue and some more original scenarios* **2**

REVIEWS

# The Giants

*Directed by* **BOULI LANNERS**
*Starring* **MARTIN NISSEN, ZACHARIE CHASSERIAUD, PAUL BARTEL**
*Released* **JULY 13**

Actor and occasional director Bouli Lanners brings the dry wit and melancholic understatement of his 2005 debut, *Ultranova*, to the coming-of-age drama in this impressionistic modern-day *Babes in the Woods* tale. Brothers Seth (Martin Nissen) and Zak (Zacharie Chasseriaud) are passing a humid summer at their recently deceased grandfather's house deep in the Belgian countryside, hanging out with local boy Danny (Paul Bartel) and getting up to all kinds of mischief: scoring weed, chugging cheap liquor, and talking (a lot of) bullshit.

This idyllic pitch is queered by the boys' rapidly diminishing funds, and it's clear that mum won't be coughing up any time soon. She is present only as the unheard side of phone conversations that become shorter and rarer as the three grungeketeers' desperation lands them a deal with local gangster Beef that is, at best, ill-advised. Homeless and mostly soaked-through, the boys embark on a series of disaster-tinged capers.

In fact, the peril is mild, with Beef more cartoon baddie than Frank Booth-style neighbourhood monster. The film's real emotional hook – and what allows it to overcome some baggy plotting – is its believable evocation of a pre-adult sense of invincibility. It's a trait that recalls Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills*, a drama which, like *The Giants*, also captured the hermetic reality of childhood make-believe.

As the boys strike out for their own personal frontier, there are nods, too, to classic American coming-of-agers. In the warmth and trust of their friendship, 1986's *Stand By Me* is the most obvious antecedent. But, in fact, the detachment and amoral appetite for destruction displayed by the protagonists is much closer to the teenage alienation on display in that year's altogether more ambiguous *River's Edge*.

The golden light and lush valley setting may take the harsh edge off the film's bleaker moments, but there's still a core of gleeful savagery which is ultimately tempered by the looming adult world and the numbness of abandonment. **PAUL FAIRCLOUGH**

**ANTICIPATION.** *'Belgian countryside'? The home of pig-bothering chocolatiers?* **1**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Engaging low-key performances and epic landscape photography more than make up for lapses in narrative focus* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Wistful, beautiful looking but as transient as that land of lost content* **3**

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# Brave

*Directed by* **MARK ANDREWS, BRENDA CHAPMAN, STEVE PURCELL**
*Starring* **KELLY MACDONALD, BILLY CONNOLLY, EMMA THOMPSON**
*Released* **AUGUST 17**

Disregard the Luxo ident and typically charming complementary short, and there's something irredeemably un-Pixar-like about *Brave*. In some ways, the studio's thirteenth feature is its most progressive. In gutsy young Princess Merida (Kelly Macdonald) it boasts the first Pixar heroine, and there are notable artistic milestones, too (this is by some distance Pixar's most beautiful film). But a dynamic female lead – even one whose coming-of-age isn't legitimised by the pursuit of some impossibly chiseled Prince Charming – isn't enough to remedy the lack of ambition in this stock Scottish fable.

Through a sequence of sweeping establishing shots we're transported to the heart of the Scottish Highlands, a backdrop as dramatic and untamed as Merida's cascading copper locks, sometime during the tenth century. Merida, an outdoorsy, independent young woman, is horrified to learn that her parents, bovine King Fergus (Billy Connolly) and pushy Queen Elinor (Emma Thompson), have invited three neighbouring clans to join them in finding her a suitor. Determined to shape her own fate, Merida defies custom during an archery contest between the first-borns of each clan chief, plunging the kingdom into chaos with a single twang of her bow in the most explicitly feminist scene in Pixar's history.

Merida is role model, action figure and new-school Disney Princess all rolled into one. A freckled crossbreed of Katniss Everdeen and Rebekah Brooks, her rebellious streak will excite younger viewers – but not so much as to upset Middle America (one cynical piece of scripting has Merida vehemently proclaim her heterosexuality, just to dispel any faint insinuation that she might be a lesbian). And yet Merida's story is neither contemporary nor socially relevant enough to raise *Brave* to the heights of Pixar's other family value-oriented adventures, *The Incredibles* and *Finding Nemo*. Indeed, for a film about finding the courage to break free from tradition, *Brave* is disappointingly conventional.

The big question is, why would a studio that has built its name on the present-day escapades of a big-hearted cowboy, missing fish, lovesick robot and Michelin-starred rodent suddenly opt for a Far, Far Away yarn more typical of its parent company? There's no obvious answer. What is clear, however, is that two years and as many sequels into the current decade, this sub-*Tangled* shopping cart of pilfered fairy tale motifs – from bubbling cauldrons and charmed potions to accursed beasts and mystical woodland sprites – suggests Pixar's sense of imagination no longer matches its appetite for technical innovation. Your move, DreamWorks. **ADAM WOODWARD**

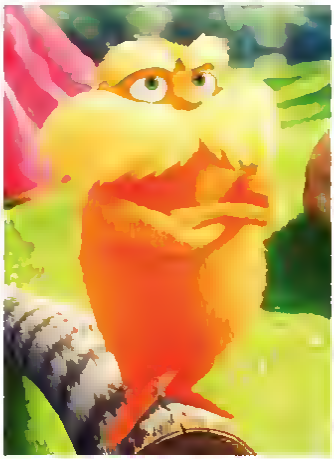
**ANTICIPATION.** *Pixar's first female protagonist heads up its first original story for three years* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *It's not* Cars 2 *bad, but* Brave *is way below the studio's gold standard.* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Visual splendour compensates for the narrative shortcomings and lack of emotional depth. Just* **3**

# Dr. Seuss' The Lorax

*Directed by* **CHRIS RENAUD, KYLE BALDA**
*Starring* **DANNY DEVITO, ED HELMS, ZAC EFRON**
*Released* **JULY 27**



In barren, all-plastic Thneedville, 12-year-old Ted (voiced by Zac Efron) wants to impress his beloved Audrey (Taylor Swift) with a real Truffula tree. So he ventures out to the wastelands beyond the city's walls, little realising that air-selling entrepreneur O'Hare (Rob Riggle) will do anything to stop the return of trees (and of free, photosynthesised oxygen).

None of the names, characters, locations or situations in this framing narrative are to be found in Dr Seuss' 1972 children's book *The Lorax*, belying the authorial attribution in the film's title. Yet the scenes in Thneedville – part throwback to a '50s-style suburban utopia of blithe singalong exuberance; part post-modern metropolis of rampant, blinkered consumerism – bring the good Doctor's environmental concerns right back to the future, satirising everything from the surveillance society to our current obsession with pointless technology and the craze for bottled water.

Seuss' original story kicks in only when Ted meets the reclusive Once-ler (Ed Helms), who remorsefully narrates a parable allegorising the Western history of colonialism, exploitation and resource depletion. In it, a younger Once-ler gradually destroys the idyllic Truffula Valley (as well as his own innocence), felling all its trees to manufacture faddish 'Thneeds', despite repeated warnings of dire consequences from 'slightly annoying' arboreal spokesman the Lorax (Danny DeVito), who eventually departs the devastated Valley in disgust.

The ecological message here is timely, complicated and unapologetically liberal. Just as the Once-ler wins over the Valley's woodland denizens with a bribe of marshmallow treats, the film's bitter pill is sugared not only with Truffula forests that look just like candy floss, but also with chipmunk-a-like fish choruses, geriatric snowboarding, a vertiginous chimactic chase sequence and cutesy critter business aplenty.

Amidst all this padding (and some of it really feels like padding) and the razzle-dazzle 3D CGI, the Lorax himself and his grumpy admonitions are pushed to the margins, impaired of impact and importance. Although, by way of compensation, Seuss' Once-ler is here given a human face, while his central musical number 'How Bad Can I Be?' operates as an anthem for the self-serving, cynical casuistry of our own times. **ANTON BITEL**

**ANTICIPATION** *From the makers of* Horton Hears a Who! *and* Despicable Me **3**

**ENJOYMENT** *A candy-coloured eye assault with too much in the way of narrative padding.* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT** *but its message is ambitious and timely* **4**

# Ping Pong

*Directed by* **HUGH HARTFORD**
*Starring* **LES D'ARCY, DOROTHY DELOW, LISA MODLICH**
*Released* **JULY 6**

Sick of the all-too-familiar seasonal blues tied to the inevitable trouncing of an ill-tempered Scot or Hawn-spoiling millionaires? Les D'Arcy is here to help. At 89, the weight-lifting widower from Wakefield is Britain's best hope for glory at the over-80s Table Tennis Championships in Inner Mongolia. But he's up against some stiff competition in the form of former Swedish champion Rune Forsberg, a long-term friend and rival, not to mention Chinese hotshot Sun Lao and Aussie treasure Dorothy Delow who, at 100-years-old, is the tournament's most senior paddle-wagger.

"Why are you participating in this competition?" a stereotypically chirpy Chinese TV reporter asks Delow in a pre-match interview. "You're so old!" That may be so, but it doesn't make our Dot any less a competitor. Indeed, age is merely a formality for the eight veteran athletes going for gold in Hugh Hartford's life-affirming human-interest doc. With a hip-busting 703 years between them, there's no shortage of anecdotes in the film's extended opening act, during which Hartford travels to five countries across four continents in order to get to know his subjects.

It's a simple and effective preamble that's key to establishing our investment in each player while boosting expectation ahead of the main event. If at this stage you're wondering why a greater chunk of *Ping Pong*'s slender 80-minute runtime wasn't dedicated to the tournament itself, the reason soon becomes apparent. Steely contenders though they are, Les and co are far more engaging away from the match table, when they're not sucking on inhalers and leaving Zimmer frame scuffmarks on the sports hall floor.

So while the novelty of watching a group of propped-up pensioners lashing forehands at each other soon wears off, at least their inspiring stories of triumph, loss and sacrifice stay with you. **ADAM WOODWARD**

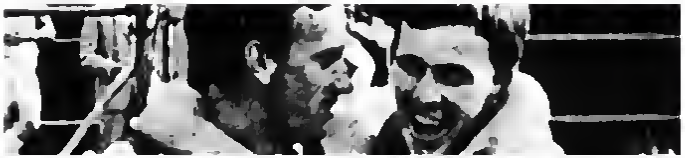
**ANTICIPATION** *An OAP's table tennis tourno? This we have to see* **3**

**ENJOYMENT** *The novelty wears off quickly enough, but the personalities behind the paddles endure.* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT** *A cute precursor to this summer's Games that doesn't quite warrant a theatrical release* **2**

# Salute

*Directed by* **MATT NORMAN**
*Starring* **PETER NORMAN, TOMMIE SMITH, JOHN CARLOS**
*Released* **JULY 13**



At the 1968 Mexico Olympics, US 200 metre runners Tommie Smith and John Carlos celebrated their respective gold and bronze medals by giving a Black Power salute; a deeply political gesture that had serious repercussions on their lives and careers. The subject of this moving, low-key documentary, however, is the third man on the podium, Australia's Peter Norman.

A committed Christian from a Salvation Army family, and dedicated to racial equality, Norman not only stood by the athletes in their actions, but wore an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge in solidarity. As a result, he was largely ostracised in his own country (which had its own racial problems – at the time it operated a whites-only immigration policy), and found his athletic career in tatters.

Using a combination of filmed round-table interviews featuring all three men, press conference footage and archive material, *Salute* delivers a compelling story of bravery, briskly sketching the strained social climate of the late '60s before moving on to the drama of the race and its aftermath. Norman makes for an excellent subject; his stoic nature and self-deprecating wit complement an impressive steeliness and commitment to the cause.

Though the film's occasional attempts to draw direct parallels between the three men's post-event situations feel ever-so-slightly stretched, there's no denying the esteem in which Carlos and Smith hold their friend.

And yet despite the strength of the content, *Salute* betrays its low budget with some dodgy production values: the audio and visual quality of the interviews is rough around the edges at best, and off-puttingly murky at worst. It would also benefit from a tighter edit.

But this film isn't about sheen and polish. It's a revealing, universal tale about an inspirational individual who stood up for his beliefs at great personal cost. *Salute* also functions as an excellent companion piece to Geoff Small's 2008 TV doc about Smith and Carlos, *Black Power Salute*. **ASHLEY CLARK**

**ANTICIPATION.** *As the Olympic juggernaut rolls into town, here's a welcome opportunity to reflect on an important political moment in sport* **3**

**ENJOYMENT** *A decent account of a compelling subject* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT** *A moving and worthwhile tale* **3**

REVIEWS

# 360

*Directed by* **FERNANDO MEIRELLES**
*Starring* **ANTHONY HOPKINS, RACHEL WEISZ, JUDE LAW**
*Released* **AUGUST 10**

Blame *Magnolia* if you want. Or *Crash*, or *Babel*, or any one of those epics of global intimacy that have coalesced into a genre of their own over the last decade or so. But where those films at least attempted to draw on real social anxieties around urban alienation, or struggled with the interconnectedness of the post-9/11 world, *360* just draws on those films. And *Love Actually*.

Despite claims that the film is based on Arthur Schnitzler's 1897 stage play, *La Ronde* – a biting satire of class transgression in *fin de siècle* Vienna with heaps of sex – *360* offers us a prettily shot, carefree world where even generic Eastern European pimps and buzz-cut American sex criminals have a clean shot at redemption.

The globetrotting narrative focuses on the abortive prostitutional dalliance of a miscellaneous International Business Traveller played by Jude Law, another of the dweeby, Beta-male characterisations he's getting worryingly good at. Law's wife (Rachel Weisz) waits for him in her expensive kitchen in the London Borough of Richard Curtis, arranging the next illicit sex session with a beefcake Brazilian photographer who, in turn, has a feisty Latina girlfriend who... And so on and so on.

It's not an original device, but with this cast and a screenplay by the writer of *The Last King of Scotland* and *Frost/Nixon*, it should add up to more than the crushingly obvious cinematic equivalent of a *Marie Claire* 'issues' featurette. There are a few moments of charm that don't feel contrived, and one stand-out performance by Ben Foster as the parolee struggling with his urge to rape up an entire airport lounge. But it's meagre payback for nearly two hours of middlebrow noodling.

It's telling that Schnitzler's play begins and ends with his prostitute, where *360* focuses on the journey of well-off couple Law and Weisz. If that shift is a nod to the film's target audience, it's probably spot on: this is a sanitised, bubble-wrapped picture of the global village that provides ersatz-serious viewing for those seeking reassurance about the big lie of the twenty-first century – that We're All In It Together. Worse, it isn't even any fun. **PAUL FAHRCLOUGH**

**ANTICIPATION** *Surely something to enjoy in that cast, the director of* City of God *and a classic source* **4**

**ENJOYMENT** *Nearly two hours of smug circle-jerking* **1**

**IN RETROSPECT** *There's one Anthony Hopkins monologue to remember, but that only highlights everything the rest of the film so sorely lacks* **2**

# Swandown

*Directed by* **ANDREW KÖTTING**
*Starring* **ANDREW KÖTTING, IAIN SINCLAIR, STEWART LEE**
*Released* **JULY 20**

As Andrew Kötting's work is laced with rigorous philosophical quotations from the likes of Romanian philosopher EM Cioran, it's safe to say he assumes a certain amount of theoretical knowledge on the part of his viewers. Yet his journeys - from 1997's *Gallivant* (around Britain's coasts), to the 2003 book/installation *In The Wake of Deadad* (through England to Mexico with inflatable representations of his late father) and now in *Swandown* (up the River Thames) - depend on unselfconscious interactions with local residents who remain oblivious to the fact that they're springboards for larger musings. "Meet ordinary people," Kötting notes in mocking voiceover while detailing his plan for the first few days. But he is green with exhaustion and ready to pack it in on day one, fit only for a few TV interviews by day three.

There are a few encounters with the same kind of friendly natives that populated *Gallivant*, local eccentrics who can be counted on to lead a brief tour through the countryside or pop off a song. But the focus is largely on Kötting and his travelling companions, most often writer/psychogeographer Iain Sinclair.

The task of divining essences from the landscape is one fraught with the possibility of alienating less academically rooted viewers, hence the need for constant self-mockery and deflation. "We're in a different kind of England... The morphic resonances of some of the things that we've begun are beginning to come back and haunt us in a different way, a kind of suburbanised way," Kötting muses to his crew via walkie-talkie. "Everything around Maidstone is a parody. You're gonna see pirate ships, you're going to see castles pretending to be castles that are really tax offices." Their response is meant to dash all charges of pretentious self-involvement. "You think what? Over."

With his big head and reassuringly biokish presence astride an inefficient swan-shaped pedalo (borrowed from venerable Hastings seafront attraction, Swan Lake), Kötting reassures viewers nothing too pretentious is about to happen. Sticking to small rural towns achieves, like *Gallivant*'s coastline route, the soothing side-effect of keeping all potential unpleasantness off-camera: there are no signs of racial friction or economic dispossession here, no homeless drug addicts or other marginalised social members. Indeed, Englishness remains disconcertingly, ill advisedly close to the 'Little Britain' eulogies of JB Priestley.

Stylistically, much of *Gallivant* unfolded with Kötting's finger on the fast-forward button, the jerky visuals exemplifying his musings on technology's over-rapid march. Here, he favours longshots, some of which are allusive (mornings in the fog on the Thames that resemble Gainsborough canvases) and others merely symmetrically serviceable. As in his earlier film, audio and video snippets from government-produced shorts of the '30s and '40s rest against chilly electronica, neatly in line with the effect produced by 'hauntology'-minded electronic musicians like Mordant Music.

London, unavoidably, resists this affirmation of cultural continuity. Fuming over "the huge enclosures of the Olympic site", Kötting is denied permission to navigate the waters nearby, his journey ending with peevish justification for his preference for a relatively untroubled past alive in the countryside. **VADIM RIZOV**

**ANTICIPATION.** *The madcap latest from Britain's premiere psychogeographer and film artist* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *A jolly tin-pot* Fitzcarraldo. **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Misses a few socio-political tricks, but Kötting and Sinclair make for fine shipmates* **3**

*Interview by* **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **ADAM CRUFT**

# Andrew Kötting

The restless dynamism of British artist and filmmaker Andrew Kötting is all over his latest madcap project. *Swandown* is a Dadaist odyssey from Hastings to Hackney on the back of a swan-shaped pedalo named Edith. The film is a collaboration with writer and psychogeographer Iain Sinclair, who sits in as Kötting's learned shipmate. The initial aim of the film was to take a pop at one of Sinclair's *bêtes noires*, the London Olympics. But, as Kötting explains here, things didn't go entirely as planned...

"I am initially proposed to me that I swim the London Borough of Hackney It was a nice idea but I wasn't really up for that Iain has a bolthole in Hastings. He's an edgeland voyeur He's a kindred spirit Whatever we chose to do, he was up for the craic. I did a series of walks with minature swans Then I saw the swan pedalos down on the Hastings seafront..I thought, 'I'd much rather pedal around Hackney'

"So we riffed on that for about 18 montha, produced a series of installations, maps, books images and performances. Deep down, he was more negative than I was about getting it funded I just thought, 'Fuck it let's just do it Even if we get turned back at Rye or we just drift into the English Channel, so be it That will be the film.' Failing would've been as interesting as succeeding.

"The apparatus of cinema and the apparatus of the film industry were all over my 2009 film, *Ivul* There's more vigour and less rigour to *Swandown* Stewart Lee, who is one of the passengers in the pedalo, talks about reverse engineering, and that was what we were doing. We shot loads of stuff, edited it, then told everyone that was what it was meant to be like

"Swans are ridiculous animals But also the pedalos themselves There's something absurd about two blokes sat in one It feels very *Goons* or Dadaist For me that's really important. No one's really going to take you that seriously when you're on board a giant swan. As we travelled down river, Iain brought in all the points of reference, whether literary, historical, mythological or what he describes as 'morphic resonators' Along the journey, we started off as 'pedalees', then 'pedalphiles' and finally we settled on 'swandoliers'

"On paper, a lot of people may think this film is about penetrating the Olympic site and making a political statement Near the end, Iain leaves to go to Boston, and for me, the remainder of the voyage became quite poignant After three weeks of being together with this incredible mind, he had become so much more playful and less didactic than I would've imagined. Iain is wonderful company He's so robust He gets out there and beats the bounds. He does his thing because that's where his cerebral energy comes from. I am, as a counterpoint, the buffoon. The Benny Hill to his William Blake, the Stan to his Ollie the Estragon to his Vladimir

"When we were about to enter the Olympic zone, he wasn't there to experience it. The film changes gear at that point It becomes more melancholic, dreamlike and hallucinatory We're disappearing into a fog of twenty-first-century consciousness Iain Sinclair is a flesh radio. You tune in to him and you hear stuff With *Swandown*, I wanted to show Iain's more humanistic side. I wanted people to tune in to him

"We'd done some live performances before and I think he likes me taking the piss. He's on a pedestal, for sure The man is quite remarkable and, in my opinion, one of the most interesting writers this island has produced. But, I can't help myself I need to trip him up. I need to kick the legs from beneath him I love meeting strangers and Iain really doesn't. He's very frightened of those kinds of meetings Those experiences that we had together lead him to extract and pontificate and confabulate and create I'm just performing in that moment That's just what I like to do.

"When I'm sculpting the film, I'm always looking for those edit points They're like ruptures or disjuncts Eventually, a rhythm unfolds and it feels kind of berserk and a bit bricolagy Out of that mess, out of that sonic and visual cacophony, things begin to flow I equate filmmaking with dub reggae You need to lay down your bass and seduce people with your rhythms. Here, that's the peddling. But it's also an opera, with the libretto delivered by Iain

'With *Swandown*, there's no point of reference out there Maybe Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* but even then it's people dressing up and performing This is more like Conrad We didn't know what was going to happen. My filmmaking is driven by the dare Health and safety issues about me being in this fetid canal in a tailored suit and a pair of heavy walking boots became slightly audacious and even risky But at no point did I feel in jeopardy. I wore the suit every day, slept in it. The jacket is lined in swan down and it's what kept me warm.

"One of the things I saw in the edit the pedalees that came and joined us were, if anything, distracting us from this relationship that was unfolding. There's a closeness. It's palpable. You can see that there are these two old codgers who are enjoying each other's company In that sense, *Swandown* is a strange kind of love story"

See *Swandown The Installation* at Dulston Grove Bermondsey until July 29

# Magic Mike

*Directed by* **STEVEN SODERBERGH**
*Starring* **CHANNING TATUM, ALEX PETTYFER, MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY**
*Released* **JULY 11**

Cast your mind back to August 1997. Blair was brand new; the Spice Girls were the singular, gaudy embodiment of British Culture, and a cute little film called *The Full Monty* scuttled into cinemas and thrust its greasy Northern posing-pouch into the face of an unsuspecting world. Peter Cattaneo's tale of six losers from Sheffield banding together to form a ramshackle strip-troupe touched a nerve. It wasn't seedy or gratuitous but charming, beautiful and redemptive.

Fifteen years later, the moral and aesthetic landscape of the stripper movie has changed again. On the surface of Steven Soderbergh's *Magic Mike*, the boys are badder, the bodies are buffer and the dicks are bigger. But underneath the sweat and machismo, *Magic Mike* somehow manages to retain the same gentle humanity and deep anguish prominent in its quaint British antecedent.

Channing Tatum plays the eponymous Mike, a roof tiler by day and wisecracking stripper by night. Up on the roof, Mike meets The Kid (Alex Pettyfer), a 19-year-old dropout with a thirst for anything better than what he's got right now. Taken with the stripper's cool demeanour and cooler lifestyle (which, go figure, is full of easy girls), The Kid crowbars his way into Mike's life and the two become, you guessed it, buddies.

So the parameters are set. It's a buddy movie, not a chick-flick. But wait... it's a buddy movie with dudes who drop their trousers for a living, so it's full of gross physical comedy and carwash montages, right? Wrong. Soderbergh initially trips over himself to try and get away from what might be expected of a film about male strippers, but after a few initial belly laughs and some shots of bare rear-ends, the film gradually descends towards something darker, more dangerous and ultimately more engaging.

From Matthew McConaughey's strip-joint madame, Dallas ("Who's got the cock? You do!"), to Joe Manganiello's Big Dick Richie, the principal characters – all bar one of whom are male – aren't dreamy Hollywood beefcakes. Behind their stripper façades, these men are compelling and vulnerable, and Soderbergh manages to capture their collective addiction to a superficially euphoric world that is, in reality, completely destructive, with his customarily astute eye.

Despite being decked-out in a different outfit, it's not unlike its older British cousin. It's not tacky. It's not a romp. It's not glossy and it's not sexy. It has charm. But more than that, *Magic Mike* is a product of a time where the summer of love is well and truly over. It's a coming-of-age story written on sandpaper about the bleak uncertainty of young adulthood, the slippery danger of getting too rich too quick, and the realisation that some dreams never will come true. **ANDY TWEDDLE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANTICIPATION** *The half-full monty* | **3** |
| **ENJOYMENT** *Dude, where's my lap dance?* | **3** |
| **IN RETROSPECT** *Boogie (nights) wonderland* | **4** |

AFTER THE PINOCHET CASE AND SALVADOR ALLENDE

# NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT

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# Red Desert (1964)

*Directed by* **MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI**
*Starring* **MONICA VITTI, RICHARD HARRIS, CARLO CHIONETTI**
*Released* **JULY 27**

In *Red Desert*, Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 masterpiece, Giuliana (Monica Vitti) wanders around Ravenna, Italy, trying to reintegrate into her life following a nervous collapse that necessitated an extended hospital stay. The triggering incident for her breakdown may have been a car accident, but one look at the lost woman wandering around the film's foreboding ly beautiful industrial landscapes and stunning interiors, oppressive in their geometrical precision, and it's easy enough to ascribe the real cause of her ongoing alienation and sense of existential dread. It's something best described as 'modernity'.

None of this represents new territory for Antonioni. He had mined similar ground in his previous three films, all starring Vitti. But here, shooting in colour for the first time and working with an eerie electronic score, the filmmaker takes up where the closing sequence of his previous effort, *L'Eclisse*, left off, presenting the environment as a menacing, science-fiction landscape. Smokestacks spew yellow vapour, an apocalyptic haze obscures faces, the unsettlingly repetitious sound of ship horns drift in from the neighbouring sea.

At times, *Red Desert* feels like nothing so much as a horror film, one whose perfectly realised visual and aural design exactly mirror the crisis and confusion of its lead character. If Antonioni puts Vitti through her paces, he also allows her to craft her most fully realised and sympathetic portrait of an alienated *moderne*. Incapable of feeling and yet desperate for human connection, Giuliana keeps company with her industrialist husband's visiting colleague, Corrado Zeller (Richard Harris, whose voice, poorly dubbed into Italian, adds another layer of disconnect to the proceedings), which skirts romantic involvement.

Giuliana only temporarily seems to come alive, such as the scene depicting a sexually charged hangout in a seaside cabin in which she tells her husband she wants to make love only to be immediately rebuked. But mostly she attempts to describe her feelings of alienation and the circumstances of her hospitalisation to Corrado. Hers is a state of being brought on both by her isolated position as the wife of a captain of industry and the consuming totality of the surrounding landscape – literally and metaphorically poisonous.

Only a late fantasy sequence provides any aesthetic respite. As Giuliana narrates a tale of a girl living by herself in a river paradise, Antonioni illustrates the story, scrapping industrial haze for crystal clear lagoons. The sudden warmth of the cinematography is a startling contrast.

But such images can only ever be transitory, and as Giuliana walks away one last time through the factory grounds, seemingly reintegrated into her surroundings, we know that her life, at best, is a compromise of continual adjustment. As Giuliana puts it, and as the film makes palpably clear, "There's something terrible in reality". It's a certain frightening quality that remains incapable of articulation in our heroine's head, but finds perfect visual expression in Antonioni's unforgettable, perpetually terrifying imagery. **ANDREW SCHENKER**

**ANTICIPATION.** *A chance to see Antonioni's masterpiece on the big screen is not to be missed* **5**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Mileage may vary with this challenging but highly rewarding film* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Red Desert is Antonioni's clearest, most striking statement of purpose – and one of cinema's great films* **5**

*Words by* MATT THRIFT

# Michelangelo Antonioni

An essential guide to the work of Italy's master of modernism.



## Essence of style

Michelangelo Antonioni is one of the great cinematic innovators. With each new film he aimed to alter and challenge our perceptions of what narrative cinema can be and, moreover, what it can achieve.

Much like many of his disaffected protagonists, Antonioni's evolving style (which reached a peak of both emotional detachment and formal complexity in the early '60s with his 'Trilogy of Alienation') can be read as part of an ongoing desire to confront and confound the cinema that came before him.

His was a swift move away from the strictures of neo-realism that informed his early years in documentary filmmaking. He gravitated towards a modern and poetically objective aesthetic that continues to influence filmmakers to this day. Every time you watch a film by Béla Tarr, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Kelly Reichardt, Jia Zhangke, Hou Hsiao-hsien or Claire Denis, you're witnessing the legacy of Antonioni.

## Where to start

Antonioni's 1960s films best typify his preoccupations. *Blow-Up* (1966) is widely available on DVD and is a great place to start. His biggest commercial success, it signalled a move towards deeper contemplation that would peak (somewhat disastrously) with 1981's *The Mystery of Oberwald* – one to, if not avoid, then certainly keep near the bottom of the stack. *Blow-Up* also shares thematic concerns with his last truly great film, 1975's *The Passenger*, as both are interested in questions of perspective that challenge the very nature of film-watching and image-making.

His trilogy (actually four films) with Monica Vitti is best digested in order: 1962's *L'Eclisse* – with its eye-popping seven-minute finale – is a stunning accompaniment to the more obtuse but equally dazzling *L'Avventura* from 1960, while *La Notte* (1961) is an often-overlooked masterpiece. His move into colour photography with 1964's *Red Desert* represents perhaps the strongest distillation of Antonioni's form and themes, his characters fused to an industrial landscape in a film of devastating power. Each of these films is available on DVD but *Red Desert* should really be seen on the new Blu-ray edition.

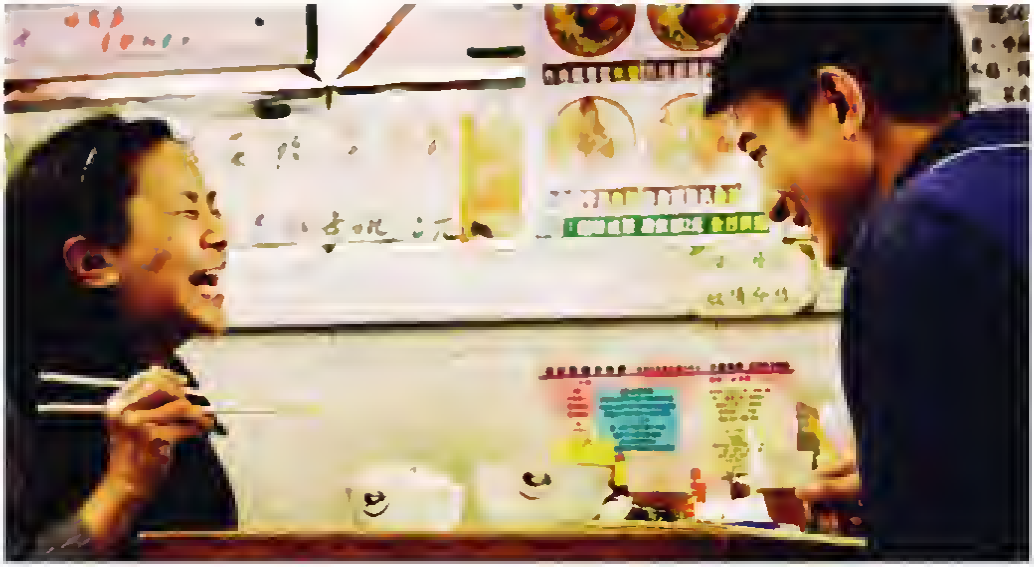
## The early years

The best of Antonioni's '50s work offers a great chance to see an extraordinary filmmaker honing his craft and experimenting with techniques that would later evolve into his singular cinematic vocabulary. They can be seen courtesy of Eureka's wonderful Masters of Cinema imprint.

*The Lady Without Camelias* (1953) and *Le Amiche* (1955) are fascinating early works, but it's his bleak masterwork from 1957, *Il Grido*, that proves the most fully realised of this period. Atypically featuring a male protagonist, in many respects it works as a tragic counterpoint to the female-led trilogy that came after. It stands as the apex of Antonioni's work to that point, until he broke through the ceiling of cinematic possibility with *L'Avventura* three years later.

## Off piste

Seen all the features? Two of Antonioni's documentaries – *Tentato Suicidio* from 1953 and *Chung Kuo – Cina* from 1972 – couldn't be more different, but both are worth picking up. The first, part of the portmanteau film *Love in the City*, is a short, highly stylised exploration of suicide which cleverly blurs the lines between documentary and fiction. *Chung Kuo – Cina* is a four-hour take on the Chinese Cultural Revolution funded by the Maoist government. It was swamped in controversy for decades due to its highly critical depiction of the country, and was only allowed to be screened in China as recently as 2004.



# A Simple Life

*Directed by* ANN HUI
*Starring* DEANNIE YIP, ANDY LAU, LAWRENCE AH MON
*Released* AUGUST 3

Never has a hunk of steamed ox tongue revealed more about the delicate relationship between a master and his servant than in veteran Hong Kong New Wave director Ann Hui's latest film.

In slicing the mass of brown meat and devouring it over a game of cards, Roger (Andy Lau) and his old classmates fondly remember the role that Ah Tao – Roger's family servant of 60 years and the cook of that now-demolished morsel – played in their lives. It reveals as much about class in contemporary Asian society as family life and loneliness. While Ah Tao (Deannie Yip) lies in an old people's home after a stroke that has left her partially paralysed, the important part she played in their lives is revealed through the enjoyment of this bovine delicacy.

And yet no sooner has Roger and Ah Tao's relationship been established in all its quiet practicality than Hui subverts it. After her stroke, Roger realises Ah Tao's significance; a tender maternal love he took for granted. He becomes her carer, paying for her treatment and supporting her through her slow physical and mental demise, assuming the role of the doting son she never had.

Elegantly and with weighty linearity, Hui weaves the burden of Ah Tao's impending death into the very core of *A Simple Life*. The depiction of Hong Kong is muted and heavy, it's not the bustling, vital metropolis usually portrayed on film, but a tightly packed collection of individuals struggling to understand their place in the world, all followed by Hui's ceaseless, stalking lens.

When Ah Tao arrives at the old people's home for the first time – a shanty town of ply board partitions in a vast warehouse room – she lies miserably on the bed, and Hui's camera remains perched atop the partition, leaving her loneliness to be felt, but leaving her well alone. It's a displaced visual tenderness, a closeness once removed, a beautiful iteration of the themes of the film.

Deannie Yip, who was named Best Actress at the 2011 Venice Film Festival for her role as the humble servant, brilliantly manages to split mind and body, depicting Ah Tao's feisty, witty character as she becomes trapped inside a body nearing its end. Andy Lau is compelling, too, as a hard-edged businessman softened by his realisation of deep feelings for his servant.

In *A Simple Life*, Hui has (re)confirmed that she is a masterful observer of the idiosyncrasies of city life, capable of forensic attention to seemingly mundane moments from which she is able to reveal something moving, tender and often overlooked. The folding of a bed or the eating of a meal in a café become signifiers of invisible yet shifting social bonds, deeply felt but never voiced. **BASIA LEWANDOWSKA CUMMINGS**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANTICIPATION.** *A long, slow film about a servant's death? Not on a sunny afternoon* | **2** |
| **ENJOYMENT.** *Surprisingly compelling in its languid beauty.* | **3** |
| **IN RETROSPECT.** *A film that will fill you with a sense of hope, and a glimpse into the realities of life in modern Hong Kong* | **3** |

# The Hunter

*Directed by* **DANIEL NETTHEIM**
*Starring* **WILLEM DAFOE, SAM NEILL, MORGANA DAVIES**
*Released* **JULY 6**

While hinting at but ultimately eschewing the broadly drawn thrills that typified Lee Tamahori's 1997 film, *The Edge*, and the existential undertones that lifted last year's man-versus-wolves survival yarn *The Grey* out of its generic trappings, Australian TV director Daniel Nettheim's unfocussed second feature struggles to find a balance between its busy thematic concerns, over-egged human drama and the elegant simplicity of its narrative.

The beasts at the heart of those previously mentioned films are of a determinedly predatory nature, while the elusive Tasmanian tiger central to Willem Dafoe's mission in *The Hunter* remains something of a benign MacGuffin. It's a supposedly extinct, locally mythologised creature sought after by competing biotech firms for unique toxins that induce paralysis in its prey. As Dafoe is sent to track what is perhaps the last remaining example of the species, one does wonder how difficult it may ultimately prove to find, given how laden the poor creature is with each and every one of the human characters' metaphorical baggage.

Dafoe clearly sees echoes of himself in the tiger's plight ("I wonder if she's the last one? Just hunting and killing, waiting to die"), while the young family to whom he slowly begins to form a patriarchal attachment invest themselves in his quest to find their missing father. The constant to-and-fro between Dafoe's mission and that burgeoning relationship means *The Hunter* never has the opportunity to fully explore either side with any true sense of depth. The scenes with the family lose themselves to an unexpected sentimentality, given that the source novel was penned by Julia Leigh, director of 2011's emotionally implacable *Sleeping Beauty*.

The Tasmanian landscape is stunningly evoked in Robert Humphreys' fog-hewn lensing, and our time spent alone with Dafoe in the wilderness is second perhaps only to that spent with local tracker Sam Neill, here on snarling form. It's just a shame that in lingering on the narrative's socio-economic and ecological context, and insistently pushing for emotional weight, *The Hunter* tries to say everything and ends up saying nothing. **MATT THRIFT**

**ANTICIPATION.** *From the producers of* Animal Kingdom *and erm, the director of TV's* Dance Academy — **2**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Dafoe and Neill are on great form in a tiger-hunting, eco-detective thriller that certainly looks the part* — **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Unfocussed and thematically overburdened. More could have been said with less* — **2**

# Seeking a Friend for the End of the World

*Directed by* **LORENE SCAFARIA**
*Starring* **STEVE CARELL, KEIRA KNIGHTLEY, ADAM BRODY**
*Released* **JULY 13**

One of those genre hybrids that must have sounded bold, exciting, even revolutionary when it was being pitched, *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* is a film that wonders aloud whether a meteor on course to destroy the earth can make a lilting love story more exciting?

'No' is the not wholly unsurprising conclusion. It's as if writer/director Lorene Scafaria decided that this unusual framing device satisfied her film's originality quotient, and so for the rest of it she doesn't really have to try. As a result, everyone we meet on screen is a cliché. Steve Carell re-runs the same character from last year's *Crazy, Stupid, Love.*, a repressed loser with too many layers of clothing who gradually gains self-confidence and cottons on to the art of casual dressing.

There's nothing more to Keira Knightley's Penny than can be guessed from the film's poster. From the whimsical pink dress and Converse sneakers to the kinky hair and armful of vinyl, she's a post-modern parody of the manic pixie dream girl. Add her to the offensively carefree, hippy-dippy ranks of Natalie Portman (in *Garden State*) and Zooey Deschanel (in everything).

Carell and Knightley spend the last three weeks of their lives on a meandering road trip. There's a big joke concerning Carell's Mexican maid who, even though the world is ending, keeps coming to clean the house. When Carell tells her to go and spend time with her family, she replies in Spanish, "I am your friend, I just want to clean your house." So.. don't feel bad about underpaid foreign labourers. They love scrubbing floors! It's the kind of line that leaves you lost for words. If only the same had happened to Scafaria, we could have avoided this calamity in the first place. **JESSICA LAMBERT**

**ANTICIPATION.** *Knightley as a manic pixie is going to be excruciating, but Carell is generally enjoyable* — **2**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Being silly is one thing, but much of this film is just dull* — **2**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *A failed attempt to mix genres, made worse by a lot of misplaced schmaltz* — **1**

# The Lodger (1927)

*Directed by* **ALFRED HITCHCOCK**
*Starring* **JUNE TRIPP, IVOR NOVELLO, MARIE AULT**
*Released* **AUGUST 10**

One of the most fascinating things about Alfred Hitchcock's 1927 silent thriller, *The Lodger*, is how many of The Master's fascinations, obsessions, themes and peculiar fetishes are already present.

Chronologically, this is the third of Hitch's 58 features, but is generally accounted by many as his genuine first. This amazing 'Story of the London Fog' (as the film is subtitled) is now available, tinted and restored, as one of the first offerings in the BFI's upcoming, three-month Hitchcock celebration, which boasts a full retrospective and includes a further eight silent restorations.

This print was viewed without composer Nitin Sawhney's new score, but the energy and visual dynamism of this story of a Ripper-esque killer on the loose in an eerily Victorian-hued Old Smoke is such that it can be unreservedly recommended not only to hardened Hitch buffs, but also to cinemagoers who may ordinarily pause before choosing to dip a toe into the gorgeous, translucent pool of silent cinema.

Audiences unused to silent film conventions may raise an amused eyebrow as would-be lodger Ivor Novello raises his own. And perhaps the manic intensity of his staring eyes is a bit of a give-away as he arrives at the door of a family boarding house run by the parents of peroxide blonde heroine, Daisy, played with increasing sympathy/perversity by June Tripp.

Those familiar with Hitch's career-long predilection for jeopardising young blonde women will already have tittered at the sight of a sexy troupe of them – the golden-curled Golden Girls – as they tumble off the stage early in the film. But Hitch needs no intertitles to explain the girls' sudden, touchingly presented anxiety, which stems from their realisation that the Ripper (here called 'The Avenger', as named in Marie Belloc Lowndes' original novel and stage play) has a similar, if more deadly, preference for fair-haired victims.

What's most impressive about *The Lodger* is the inventiveness and audacity with which Hitchcock solves problems. He creates moods that effortlessly modulate from gaiety to dread, dark humour to suspense, suspicion to fear, right through to concern, sympathy, a sense of identification and release.

It's no spoiler to say that for Hitch, the casting of matinee idol Novello made things complicated – as matters of innocence and guilt often are. The questions that he sets himself – and we, the audience, must ponder – are: who can doubt that this creepy lodger is the killer? And yet matinee idol Novello can't be the villain, can he?

It's some sport watching the young director attempting to keep these two wild horses running side by side. In doing so, he rolls out every trick he'd recently picked up, adding a new angle he'd learned from Fritz Lang here, while cutting conventional narrative flotsam there. Even more exciting are his on-the-spot inventions, from the various symbolic insertions to the literal glass ceilings that enable him to get right under the psychological feet of his characters. **WALLY HAMMOND**

**ANTICIPATION.** *A chance to catch one of Hitchcock's lesser-known early works. Newly restored, of course* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *An invigorating and intense thriller from a master-in-the-making.* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *One for Hitch fans, one for thriller fans, one for cinema fans. Do not miss* **5**

*Words by* **DAVID JENKINS**

# 39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock

*Edited by* **JAMES BELL** *Published by* **BFI**

This concept-driven anthology on the life and work of Leytonstone's favourite son is an example of how a savvy marketing hook doesn't always result in crass cultural spoon-feeding.

After 'Olympics', the word you're going to hear more than any other in the UK this summer is 'Hitch'. Arguably the greatest filmmaker ever to have graced these isles (before nicking off to LA), Alfred Hitchcock is to become the subject of a full-scale retrospective from August through October, with his sublime oeuvre of scandalous, tawdry, revisionist masterworks the springboard for various in-cinema events and online projects.

In order to whet our collective appetite, the BFI has also commissioned a tie-in volume of essays to outline the conceptual backbone of the season. The 39 Steps. These 'steps' include the formulation of Hitchcock's public persona, his curious attitudes towards screen heroines, his post-modern use of travel, his wry appropriation of murder as some kind of macabre artform, and a near-microscopic examination of all his films, collaborators and inner psyche.

This assiduous portioning up of the Hitchcock life story isn't delivered as a random collection of essays, however. Consumed as one, it also offers a probing, roughly linear, thematic and personal narrative, which allows the volume to be consumed as a biography and not merely as a dip-in reference guide (although it does work rather well on that level, too).

One of the most impressive aspects of this new book is as a showcase for some of the world's best writers on film, there's a rare pleasure to be had in seeing them all huddled within the same long, Hitchcockian shadow. Safe old hands such as Kent Jones (writing on Hitchcock's vision of America), David Thomson (on his symbiotic relationship with the film industry, and father-son relationship with Hollywood mogul Lew Wasserman) and Matthew Sweet (a brilliant essay on Hitchcock's British films) rub shoulders with rising stars such as American critic Dan Callahan (on Hitchcock's *laissez-faire* relationship with actors), Isabel Stevens (on what we can deduce from Hitchcock's art collection) and BFI curator Vic Pratt (on Hitchcock's funny bone). Room has even been made to slip in a lovely climactic essay on Hitchcock's legacy care of director and cinephile Guillermo del Toro.

Of course, the fact that every pore of Hitchcock's body of work has already been examined in near-pornographic detail – including classics such as François Truffaut's book of transcribed interviews, or Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* – does make you wonder whether there is any more to be said on the paunchy showman of twentieth-century cinema.

Yet you only need to re-watch any 10 minutes of *Vertigo*, *Psycho* or *Rear Window* to know that, with Hitch, there will always be more hard work to be done. Operating concurrently as friendly introduction, detailed reappraisal, sideways glance and indispensable aggregation, this collection rises to the upper echelons of the Hitch-crit canon.

The Genius of Hitchcock runs from August to October at the BFI Southbank, London.

# Nostalgia for the Light

*Directed by* **PATRICIO GUZMÁN**
*Starring* **GASPAR GALAZ, LAUTARO NÚÑEZ, LUIS HENRÍQUEZ**
*Released* **JULY 13**

Astronomy and the trauma of military dictatorship might seem unlikely bedfellows, but Chilean director Patricio Guzmán has combined them as the focus of his latest documentary, *Nostalgia for the Light*. His unique, ambitious approach towards healing the historical amnesia his nation suffered during the Pinochet regime of the '70s has resulted in a feature that is both poetic and profoundly moving.

The film opens with shots of an old telescope housed in a Santiago observatory. These are intercut with stunning and vivid celestial vistas. In voiceover, Guzmán recalls a time when his homeland was a haven of peace, a place that harboured a growing fascination with astronomy and the mysteries of the cosmos. "The secrets of the sky began to fall on us like translucent rain," he says. This idealised, fairy-tale vision of the past, with its nostalgic sense of enchanting wonder, soon gives way to darker memories and ideas.

Much of the film was shot in Chile's Atacama Desert, the driest place on earth. Guzman makes the most of this eerie setting, lingering over its otherworldly features: the reddish hue of its Mars-like terrain, rock drawings that date back before the European colonisation of Latin America, and centuries-old cemeteries filled with the mummified remains of dead miners.

The place is home, we're told, to a monstrous paradox. Favoured by astronomers and archaeologists for its climate and the clearness of its skies, the desert is a prime location for studying the history of humanity and its place within the universe. But it's also where Pinochet's ruling junta hid Chile's more recent, brutal past, detaining victims in Chacabuco, the regime's largest concentration camp, and burying victims – dubbed 'the disappeared' – in the surrounding expanse.

Guzman interviews two women in their seventies who have been sifting through the desert sands for decades, desperately seeking the bones of their departed relatives. These testimonies form the film's wrenching emotional core. The sheer amount of time they've dedicated to their quest is tough to comprehend. They speak with forceful yearning and beauty of expression, with one saying she wishes the telescopes didn't just look into the sky but could also see down into the earth so all the missing could be found.

The words of astronomers and archaeologists are equally striking. Gaspar Galaz explains that, while his discipline is utterly dependent on the past, unlike the mothers of the disappeared, astronomers can sleep at night, so their quests ultimately can't be compared. But former prisoners reveal that the innovative parallels Guzmán has drawn are not inappropriate or merely arbitrary, and can provide real solace.

Luis Henríquez, who learnt to observe constellations while detained in Chacabuco, says this gave him a strong sense of interior freedom. Astronomer Valentina Rodríguez, whose parents were arrested and then promptly disappeared, believes her occupation helped her to cope with their absence. She explains that calcium is present in bones and stars alike – thus matter can't be destroyed, even upon death, but is reformed as another part of the universe. **CARMEN GRAY**

**ANTICIPATION.** *Much festival buzz about this documentary-with-a difference, but will its heavy subject matter make it a slog?* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *This stunningly original, poetic yet unpretentious film shows just how creative and engaging documentaries can be* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Sticking in the mind,* Nostalgia for the Light *leaves much food for thought on life's important questions* **4**


# Undefeated

*Directed by* **DANIEL LINDSAY, T.J MARTIN**
*Starring* **BILL COURTNEY, OC BROWN, MONTRAIL BROWN**
*Released* **AUGUST 3**

Traversing some of the same ground as Kristopher Belman's *More Than a Game* and Steve James' *Hoop Dreams* and with an unmistakable hint of Peter Berg's *Friday Night Lights* *Undefeated* appears at first glance to be just another generic social sports fable. But as directors Daniel Lindsay and TJ Martin embed themselves in the lives of the Manassas Tigers football team in a broken down district of Memphis, Tennessee, it emerges instead as a drama entirely unto itself.

For six years, Coach Bill Courtney has preached character, commitment and sacrifice. It's a tough sell in a community blighted by crime and recession, to kids who can't see a future beyond the horizons of high school. But little by little, Courtney has transformed the Tigers into a winning team, leading them to their first ever play-off season.

And yet this is only half the story. While the sporting drama sets the framework, it's the human narrative that lends *Undefeated* such heart and soul. Lindsay and Martin focus on four key players. There's Courtney, of course, the cussed, articulate patriarch who sacrifices his own family for these found-sons. OC Brown is a hulking tackle whose college scholarship is put at risk by poor grades. He's tutored at a coach's home in a rich white suburb, crossing Manassas' racial divide symbolically but uneasily. Chavis is the archetypal troubled youth whose personal journey is one of the film's most compelling. But it's Montrail 'Money' Brown who really anchors the show. A sensitive, intelligent young man injured halfway through the season, his struggles and redemption are pure Hollywood ending.

That's the thing about American football. It's uncanny propensity for drama. This unlikely season of last-minute turnarounds and personal transformations is tailor-made for cinema, for montage, dramatic close-up and steady observation, all of which are deployed by Lindsay and Martin, alongside an effervescent ghetto gospel soundtrack.

*Undefeated*, then, is both the film you suspect it might be and something else entirely. The clue is in the title. "Anybody can be a winner," says Coach Courtney. "It's how you respond to failure that makes you a man." To corrupt another of his favourite phrases: watching *Undefeated* won't build character; but it will reveal it. **MATT BOCHENSKI**

**ANTICIPATION.** *Looks niche, but suckers for sports docs have been getting excited about this one* **3**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Subtle, surprising and, at its best, revelatory* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Can take its place proudly alongside the best in the genre* **4**

# END

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# Creative Brief: LWLiquor Label

Rotgut, White Lightning, Mountain Dew... Franklin County moonshine had many different names. What it didn't have was a look, a visual hook – a killer label. We aim to fix that.

This issue's Creative Brief is to design a 'LWLiquor Label'. Taking inspiration from classic whisky bottles, Prohibition-era style and *LWLies*' unique aesthetic, we want you to create a one-of-a-kind label for use on a limited-edition *LWLies* liquor bottle.

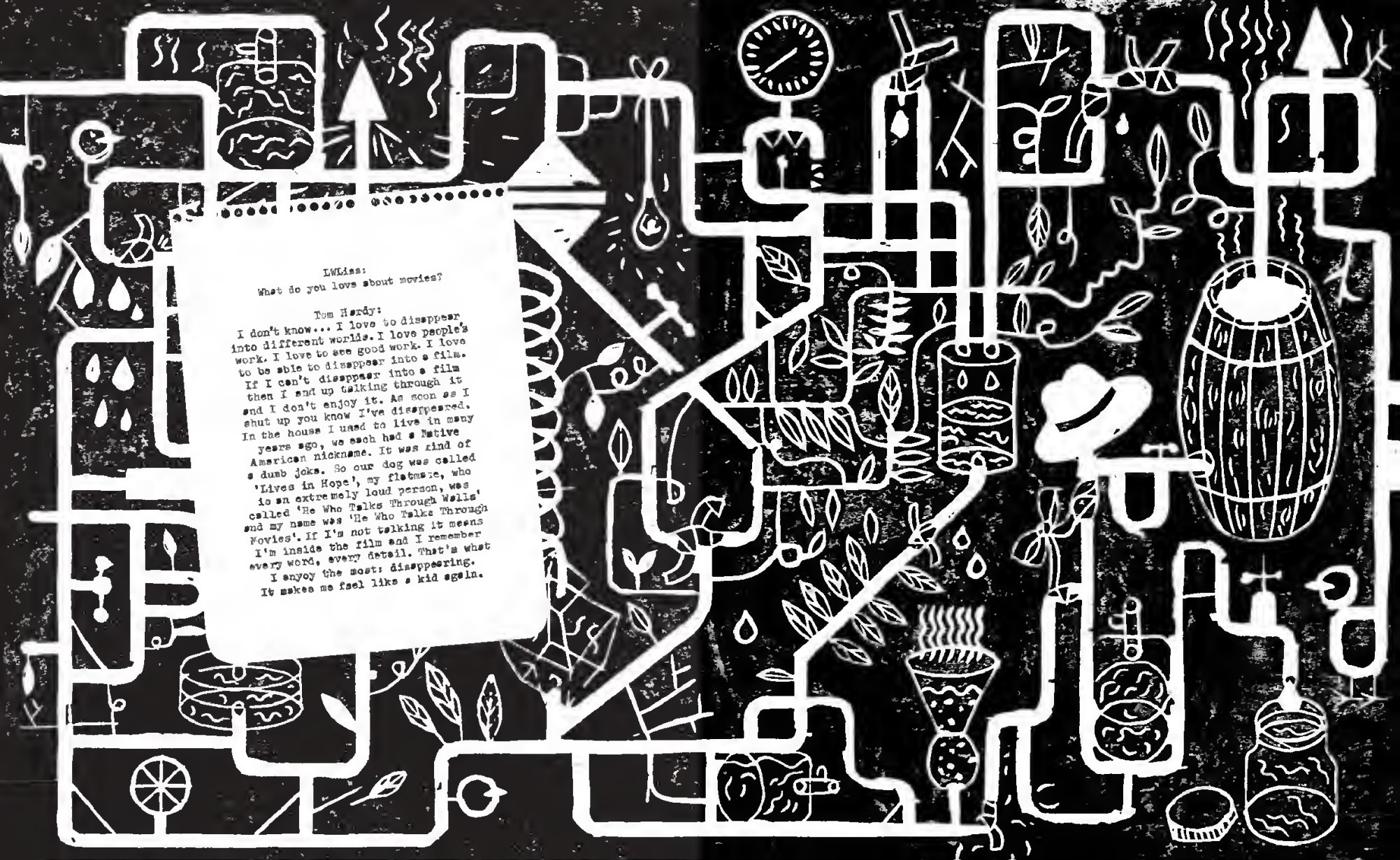
We'll be distributing the bottle at a preview screening of *Lawless* in our 71a space on Thursday September 6. The winner will be picked by *Lawless* director John Hillcoat himself, and will receive a screen print of their design plus two tickets to the preview screening.

**To enter, simply send us your design as a high resolution JPEG to competitions@thechurchoflondon.com by 17:00 on Friday August 17.**

**You can also enter by Tweeting your entry to @LWLies using the hashtag #lwliescreativebrief**

**Our favourite entries will be displayed on the *LWLies* Facebook page shortly after the competition closes.**

**See littlewhitelies.co.uk for T&Cs.**



LWLiss:
What do you love about movies?

Tom Hardy:
I don't know... I love to disappear into different worlds. I love people's work. I love to see good work. I love to be able to disappear into a film. If I can't disappear into a film then I end up talking through it and I don't enjoy it. As soon as I shut up you know I've disappeared. In the house I used to live in many years ago, we each had a Native American nickname. It was kind of a dumb joke. So our dog was called 'Lives in Hope', my flatmate, who is an extremely loud person, was called 'He Who Talks Through Walls' and my name was 'He Who Talks Through Movies'. If I'm not talking it means I'm inside the film and I remember every word, every detail. That's what I enjoy the most: disappearing. It makes me feel like a kid again.

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